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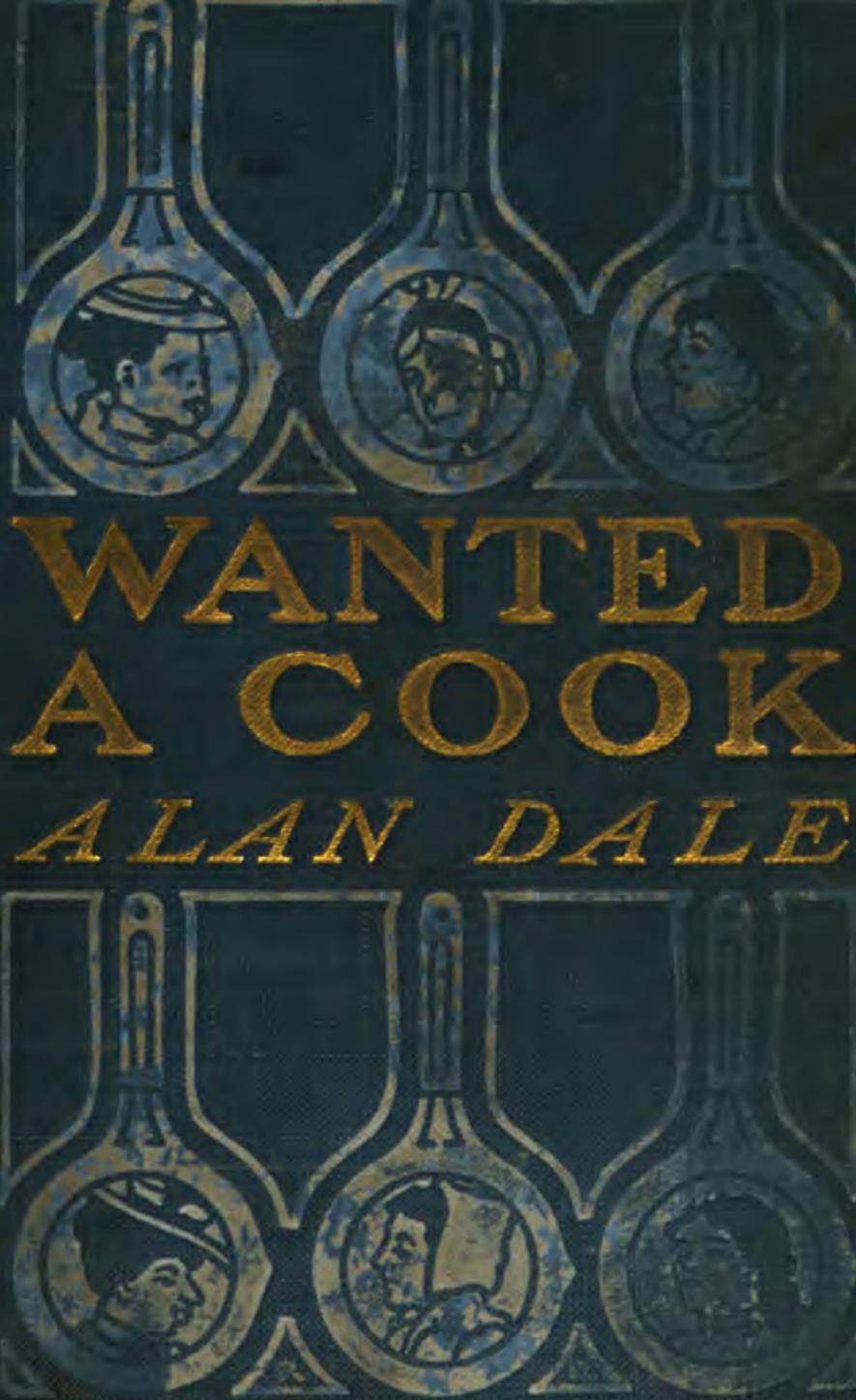
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ALAN DALE

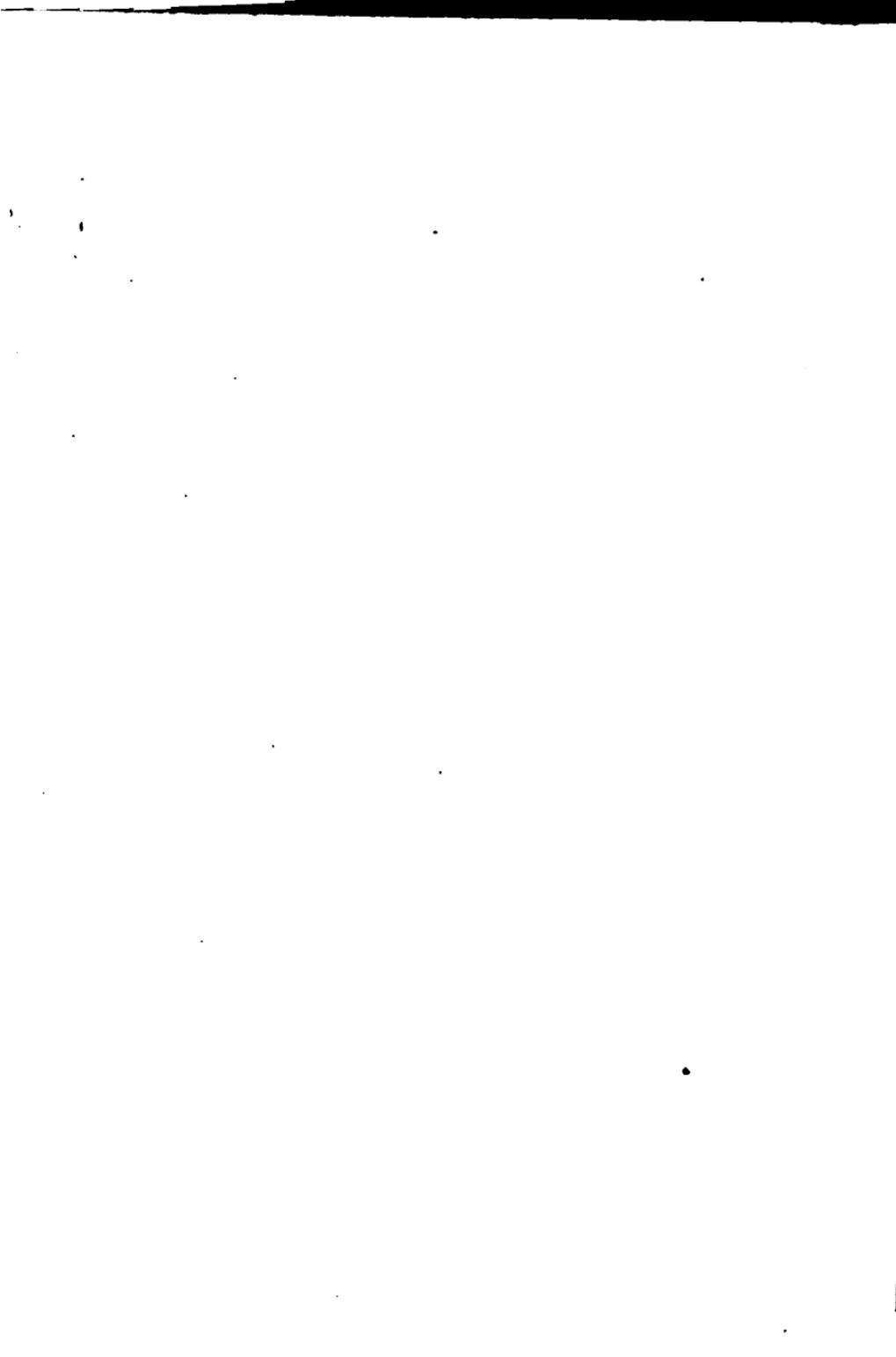
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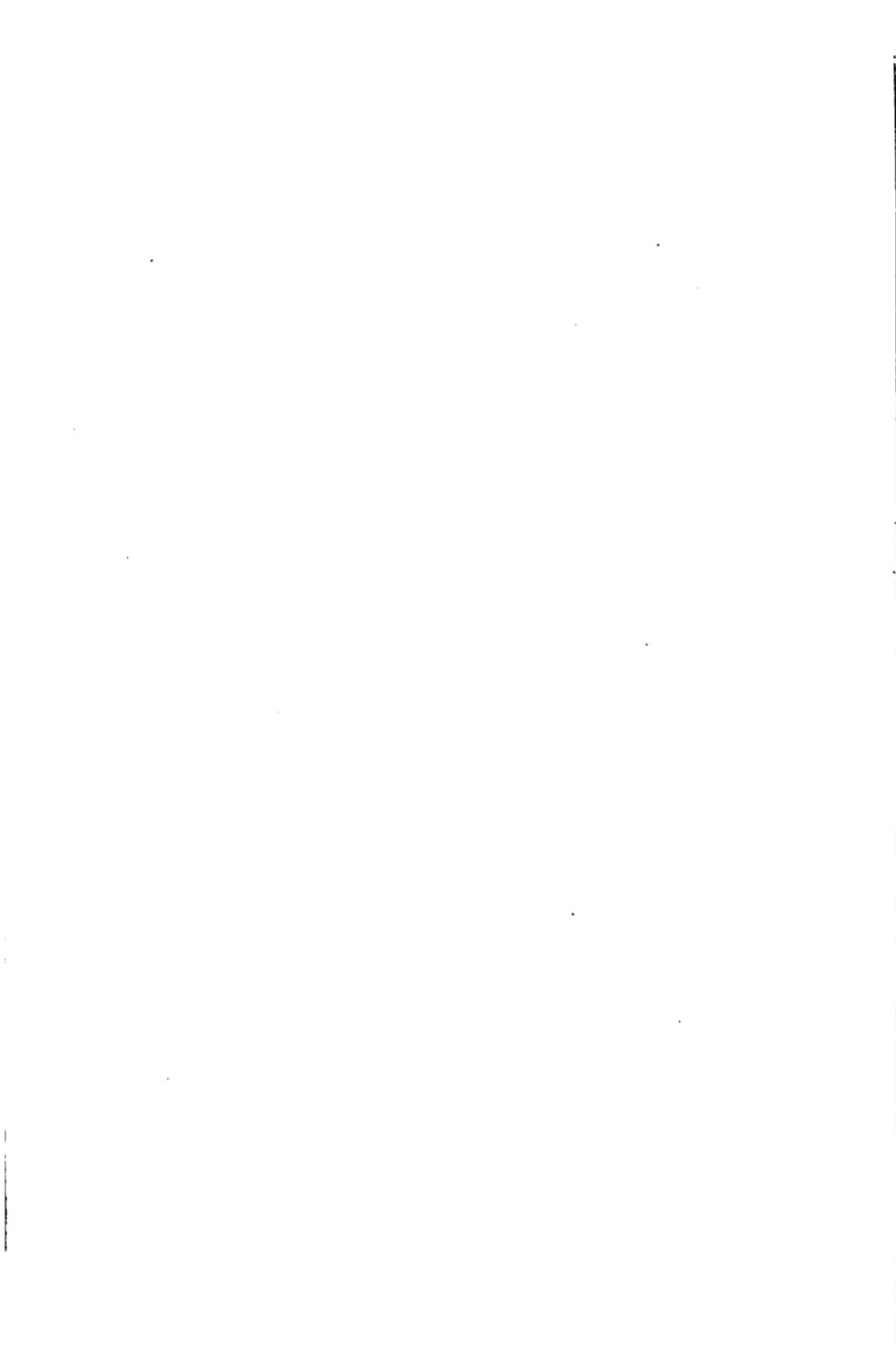
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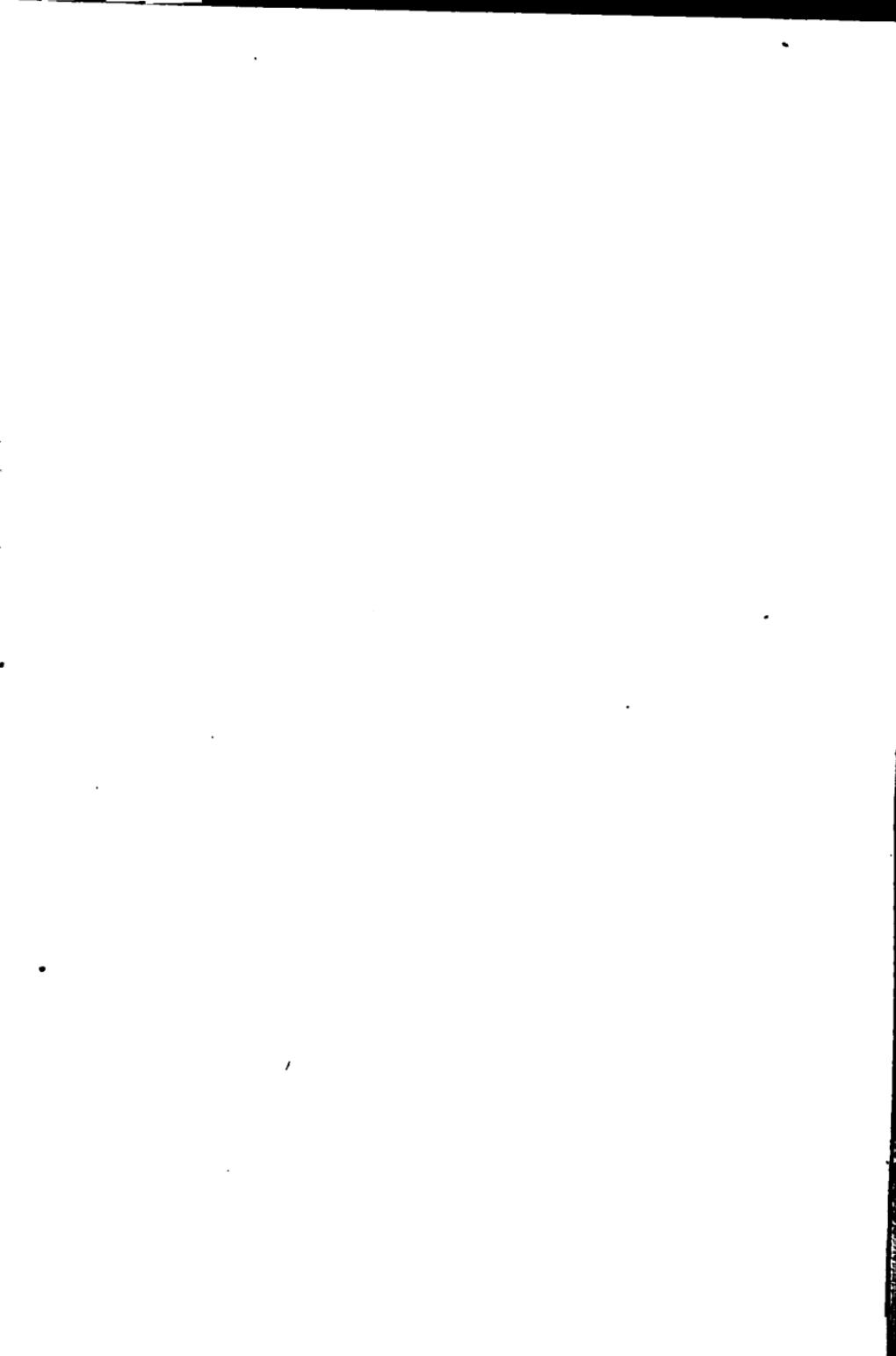


THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
OF NEW YORK

1918









WANTED: A COOK



WANTED: A COOK

Domestic Dialogues

By

ALAN DALE

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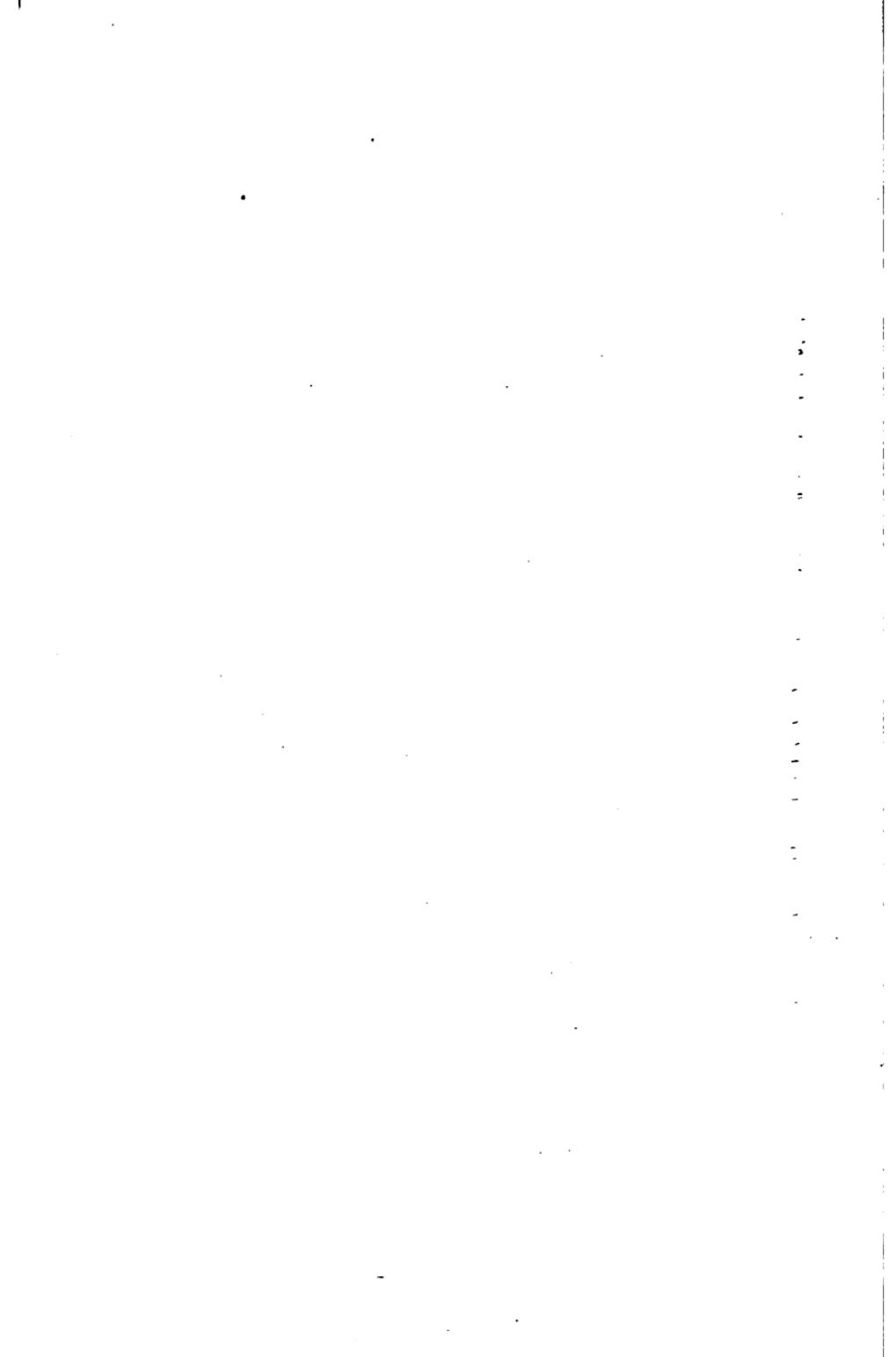
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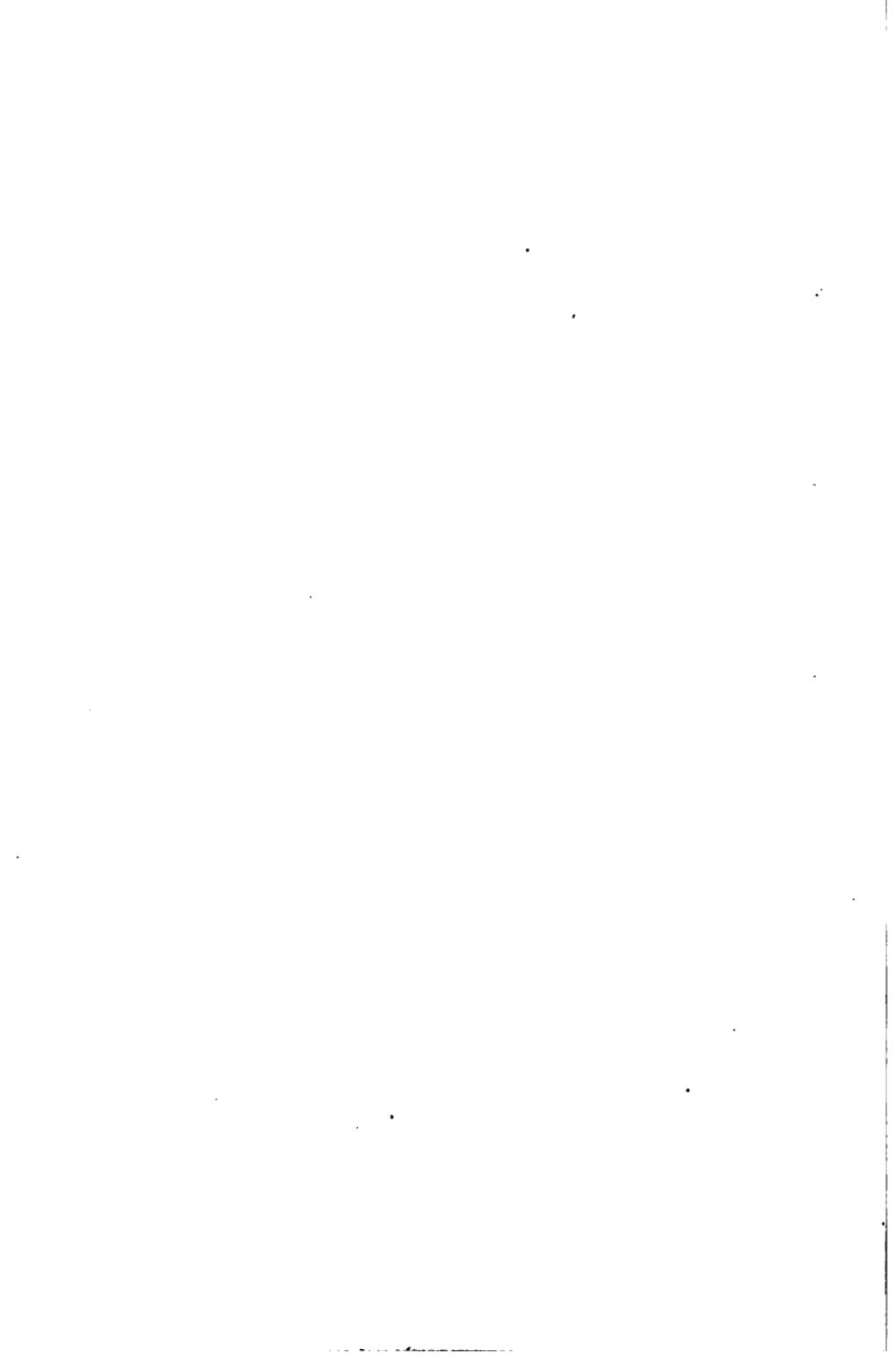
To JENNIE SHALEK: housewife,
who, in my hour of drab and dreary cooklessness,
when my heart fainted, and tragedy impended, sent
her four fair daughters to my aid, with an ancient
Hibernal curio destined to eke out a livelihood at
my expense; who knows the true inwardness of
this tragic topic, and who would gladly lend a
willing hand and an unwilling cook to any sufferer,
I gratefully dedicate these simple, plaintive
dialogues.

ALAN DALE

*New York City,
September, 1904*



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CHAPTER I

My Letitia! It was indeed a proud and glowing moment when I slipped the little golden circlet on her fair, slim, girlish finger, and realized that she was assuredly mine. We were so eminently suited to each other—both young, enthusiastic, and unspotted from the world. We had our own pet theories, and long before marriage we had communed on that favorite, misunderstood topic—the sanctity of the home.

Letitia was exceedingly well-read, and the polish upon her education shone. It was no mere thin veneer, to be worn off by a too brutal contact with the rough edges of the world. It was an ingrained polish. She adored the classics. Other girls would sit down and pore over the Sarah-Jane romances of the hour. My Letitia liked Virgil. In French she was fearfully familiar with Molière and Racine. In German she coquettled with Schiller in the most delightful manner. She knew most of the students' readings of Shakespeare. In fact, she fascinated me by her arch refinement.

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We were both great sticklers for refinement. We pitied the poor silly things who knew how to sew and cook. Refinement—we were both certain of it—was the cultivation of the gloriously useless. We despised the abominably useful. It was so sordid. We felt convinced that our “home” could be conducted upon suave and easy lines, without abandoning even one of our theories. Letitia told me that “home” was the Anglo-Saxon *ham*, and I was so much in love with her, that I didn’t mind in the least. In fact, I hinted that I had suspected as much. How could “home” be anything else but Anglo-Saxon?

My little girl had been “finished” in Paris, at a select, and pleasingly dismal, *pension* in the Avenue du Roule. I, myself, had taken a B. A. at Oxford. Yet we were triumphantly patriotic Americans. We returned to these shores absolutely convinced that they were beyond criticism. After all, people only go abroad in order that they may realize the inferiority of Europe. They never go for a “good time,” or for mere frivolous amusement. The great armies of Americans in London and Paris are there simply because they prefer America and want that fact brought home to them. If you don’t believe me, ask them. Nail them down to their patriotism.

However, both Letitia and I grudgingly admitted

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that in England home life did seem a bit more potent than on this side.

"It naturally would," said Letitia, "because you see 'home' is really an Anglo-Saxon idea."

But we were going to have a home of our own in the very midst of seething New York. The mere notion of a vulgar, degrading "boarding-house" was detestable to us, while as for the "apartment hotel," where you sat at dinner in your best clothes with a crowd of unsympathetic strangers, we sniffed at the bare suggestion. We wanted a little refuge, tiny yet dainty, where we could be alone to live our lives. "To live our lives" was one of Letitia's expressions. She abstracted it unconsciously, I believe, from Ibsen. A chaste and cherishable resort, where of an evening my wife could read *The Iliad* in the original, and I, in a becoming smoking-jacket and velvet slippers, could work at my *Lives of Great Men*, was what we clamored to possess. And possess it we fully intended to do.

I may add that Letitia also believed in the "new thought." She was of the opinion that you could will anything you wanted. She doted on sitting still, and sending out telepathic waves from her cunning little brain, and I loved to look at her telepathing. She was at her prettiest.

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Aunt Julia Dinsmore, Letitia's only relative, and a sedate old lady with drab ideas, mentioned something about the "servant question" as she listened to our domestic rhapsodies. She suggested to us that there must be some satisfactory reason to explain the lack of well-appointed homes in New York. Americans liked comfort just as well as other people, said she. Did we suppose that they were uncomfortable because they preferred discomfort? And again she referred to the "servant question."

The "servant question"! How we laughed! Letitia nudged me under the table and arched her eyebrows. She turned to Aunt Julia and quoted one of Shakespeare's most beautiful passages:

"How well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world,
When service sweat for duty, not for meed!"

It is one of the many charming things in *As You Like It*. Aunt Julia said that it had nothing whatsoever to do with the case. Perhaps it hadn't. In fact, as I think it over now, I can't quite see its relevancy. Yet what mattered relevancy? It was a treat to listen to Letitia when she quoted.

"Your Shakespeare will die when your cook comes in," said Aunt Julia, and she laughed. People are so fond of laughing at their own epigrams. It is

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most irritating—just as though the utterance of this perverted form of philosophy were a relief.

“You dear silly old thing!” exclaimed Letitia to her aunt, “we shall not worry. We don’t read the comic papers. Americans believe all the wretched jokes, dished up for them, to be founded on fact. Americans believe anything. They have no time to think for themselves. Have they, Archie?”

All I could reply was: “No.” I should like to have been pungent and clever, but somehow or other, I never can follow Letitia. She generally appeals to me with a deft query, destined to color her own delightful train of thought, and I have nothing better to say than “no”—or occasionally “yes.”

After that, Aunt Julia dropped the “servant question,” as she called it. The “servant question”! As though there could be such a question! How could refined and educated people elect to permit the mere matter of domestic drudgery to be a “question”? Art might be a question. Science was certainly a question. But to allude to the handmaiden, who opens your front door, or to the person who Marylands your terrapin, as a “question” was too ludicrous. It was making mountains out of molehills. Ah! Letitia and I were for the glorious mountains, with their sun-kissed peaks and their exultant elevation.

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We were neither of us freighted with that detestable thing dubbed a "sense of humor." Thank goodness for that! A sense of humor is a handicap in the world's race. People afflicted with it seem to spend their time laughing at their friends, scoffing at serious situations, and extracting spurious merriment from the gravity and dignity of life. We both believed that a sense of humor was unrefined. Comic story-tellers, comic poets, comic critics—how we loathed them! They were parasites on the face of things, giving you stones when you craved bread—furnishing nasty, sickly ridicule in lieu of delicate, intellectual analysis. Thank goodness, that both Letitia and I had been spared the curse of a "sense of humor." We had been educated beyond it.

Aunt Julia, as I said, was henceforth silent—or comparatively silent—on her banal, squalid "servant question." But she was rampant and interfering again when we selected the pretty little apartment—in a beautiful neighborhood—that was to be our home—Letitia's and mine! We took it without a question, there being nothing that we wanted to know. It was not one of those American institutions in which, to get from the drawing-room to the dining-room, you were forced to walk through the bedrooms, no matter who happened to be in them, asleep, or dressing. It

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had a "private hall," and each room possessed a window. Why each room shouldn't possess a window, I can't explain, but windows in up-to-date apartments are a luxury, and not a necessity. I dare say that they are very old-fashioned, but they are one of the last remnants of old fashion to which I cling.

It was a small apartment with "six rooms and bath"—very cozy, and quite light and cheerful without furniture. After we had seen our dainty "belongings" moved in, we were bound to admit that some people might say that it all looked "stuffy." Letitia didn't think so; nor did I. Much we cared!

Still, it was quite remarkable what a difference furniture made. It really seemed to be in the way. The drawing-room was almost blocked up with its chairs and sofas, what-nots, and ottomans. It had seemed quite a spacious apartment when in its natural state. One would have thought that it mutely rebelled at the indignity of furniture. Yet one must furnish!

The only thing to do in our drawing-room was to sit down. It was quite comfortable sitting down. It seemed like refuge to get to a chair—out of harm's way. When up and doing, you had to dodge and to steer yourself. We often went there before we were married, just to get used to the position of the furniture. In front of the fireplace—where there would

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never be any fire, as everything was steam-heated—we placed the tiger-rug, with the real tiger-head, that Aunt Julia gave us. It was rather dark by the fire-place, as a bookcase, a what-not, a dear little *tête-à-tête* chair and a “cosy corner” were in its vicinity and we always fell over the tiger’s head. It was most amusing at first. I laughed when it brought Letitia down. Letitia laughed when she saw me prone. But one tires so quickly of innocent pleasure! The last time we visited the apartment before the gorgeous day when it literally became “ours,” I fell over the tiger-head, and—it palled. For the first time it didn’t seem so funny. I am glad to say that Letitia laughed just the same, her mind being more ingenuous than mine.

In the dining-room, too, there was a wealth of furniture. It was such a cheerful room when we first saw it, but when curtained and upholstered, it was necessary to switch on the electric light in order to see where the table was. Of course, this didn’t matter at all. It was merely a new experience and deliciously odd. Still, we both agreed that if we preferred air and light to material, bodily comfort, our “home” was infinitely brighter unfurnished. As a matter of fact, the simplest necessities of domestic life were encumbrances. We had to ponder over an extra chair. The disposal of a small footstool called for a mathe-

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matical mind. As for the table, it had—like most other tables—four legs, but three of them were ridiculously in the way. They seemed like abnormal growths.

We were delighted at all this innovation. We prat-tled about our “home” by the hour. These—or rather, this—might be the ancestral halls of our great-great-grandchildren, though at present it seemed destined for one generation at a time—and a small generation, too. There was scarcely room for even an ancestor, and I couldn’t help feeling thankful that ancestors were not usual in New York.

The bedrooms surprised us. They were called bed-rooms, because nobody had yet thought out any other name for them. We were both loud in praise of their coziness. They were simply full of coziness. There was no room for anything else. Furnished with ledges or bunks as on board ship, they would have been most spacious and agreeable. With beds in them they bulged. Letitia admitted this, when I called her attention to it. She laughed and quoted Ben Jon-son’s memorable words: “I will not lodge thee by Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie a little further to make thee a room.” And, as usual, I kissed her. Her splendid thoughts were independent of mere space. They rose above and superior to close

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modernity. Thank goodness, again, for the lack of a sense of humor! With it, I might have said things about Chaucer, Spenser, and Beaumont, at which the groundlings, would, perchance, have smiled. The humorists, so-called, would sell their souls for a laugh.

We never once looked at the kitchen. Not for worlds would we have betrayed so mean and petty a spirit. Undoubtedly there are women who would have peered into this food-resort, and have held forth on such disgusting topics as "tubs" and "hot and cold water." Ugh! How nauseating! Letitia simply passed it by with a shrug. It *had* to be there, of course, but it had nothing to do with our case. Cook would probably know if it were properly appointed. This was what cook was for. The agent had told us that a bedroom for a cook was conveniently adjoining. To which Letitia had replied, in evident amusement, "No doubt. Why not?" I thought it clever, and I believe that the agent did, for he turned his face quickly away.

Aunt Julia had supplied the cooking utensils, I am thankful to say. We had no interest in them. We agreed that they were necessary, but we were willing to pay, and to pay well, for a careful custodian of that sort of thing. But as I began to say before, Aunt Julia, after having wisely dropped the "servant

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question," became rampant and interfering on the subject of our apartment. She asked distressing questions about "dumb waiters," and "janitors," and "washing."

Letitia was reading Cicero's *De Amicitia* at the time, I remember, while I was making notes of some incidents in the life of Goethe that I meant to incorporate in my book. I bore with Aunt Julia most patiently. As I could not answer her questions, I parried them very good-naturedly. After all, she was Letitia's only relative, and she was old, and rather infirm. One must be polite, even when it would be excruciatingly exquisite to be otherwise.

"I must say," remarked Aunt Julia, "that you don't seem to have looked at anything. You have taken an apartment, and you know nothing at all about it. You are a couple of silly children."

"Pardon me," I said, "but we have looked at all that it was necessary to look at. I don't expect Letitia to grovel."

"Grovel!" cried Aunt Julia, "grovel! I like that. In my time, a housewife knew what she was doing—"

"That's just it," I interrupted. "In your time, Aunt Julia, there were housewives. I hate the phrase. Housewife—wife of the house. I want my wife for myself, not for my house. In your time, I dare say,

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women so far forgot themselves—yes, forgot themselves, Aunt Julia—as to discuss the laundry, or the market, with their husbands. That, I may say, is not our idea. I want your dear little niece to stay in her drawing-room—”

“Stay in her—what?” cried Aunt Julia furiously.

“I repeat: her drawing-room. Oh, I know that you would prefer that I say ‘parlor.’ I decline to do so. It is a word that grates on my nerves. In England, they have ‘parlors’ in hovels. You enter the ‘parlor’ direct from the street. It is quite unnecessary to cast a stigma on a room. Drawing-room sounds much more refined. With us it will be drawing-room.”

“I think Archie is right, Aunt Julia,” said Letitia, looking up from *De Amicitia*, and smiling at me—dear little girl! “It is a prettier term, isn’t it? ‘Parlor’ sounds so awfully poor, and—well, dear, we are really not awfully poor. It is the little refinements of life that count. I don’t think I could feel at home in a parlor. I just adore the notion of my drawing-room.”

Aunt Julia laughed. It wasn’t one of those laughs that signify merriment. It was that contemptuous something that we call a laugh for want of a better

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word. I should classify it as a snortch, or a sniffth. It angered me considerably.

"There are no drawing-rooms," continued Letitia's relative, "in One-Hundred-and-Fourth Street, near Columbus Avenue. I should think you would be satisfied to hear them called 'parlors.' Cubby-holes would be more appropriate. Of course, I may be all wrong. Of course. Ha! Ha! To talk as though you owned Marlborough House, or Buckingham Palace, or Vanderbilt's mansion! Ha! Ha! It is too preposterous."

I saw a flush on my Letitia's face. She had closed her Cicero with a sigh. All this small-talk was nerve-racking.

"A drawing-room," persisted Aunt Julia, "is literally the room to which the guests withdraw after dinner. I imagine that your guests will withdraw to it not only after dinner, but after luncheon and breakfast as well. In fact they will be obliged to withdraw there or sit on the fire-escape. By-the-by, have you a fire-escape?"

As though I knew or cared! Fancy selecting a home, and inquiring if there were any means by which you could escape from it. I did not answer. My mind was brooding over the question of withdrawing from the dining-room. Next to our dining-room was the bathroom. It was rather an odd arrangement,

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especially as bathing is considered dangerous immediately after eating. The man who designed our "home" evidently thought that a bath after a meal was a good thing. Otherwise, why place the bathroom next to the dining-room?

I recovered my equanimity instantly. "You are trying to discourage us, Aunt Julia," I said, "but it won't work. You can call the drawing-room a 'parlor' if you like. But we shan't. Nor are we trying to ape Buckingham Palace. We are too American for that. The trouble here is that whenever you try to be nice, refined, and courteous, you are accused of aping something. We ape nothing at all. We prefer a drawing-room because it has a more cultured sound. Just as we intend to call the china-closet a 'pantry.' This is a free country."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Aunt Julia. "You are very devoted to your drawing-room and your pantry, but I'm grieved to think that a sensible girl like Letitia, and an able-bodied young man, like yourself, haven't thought it worth while to ask the janitor about the disposition of the garbage."

That settled it. I had endured a good deal. I had been patient, polite, kindly, and amused. Yes, I had been half-amused. When I heard Aunt Julia sully her lips with a word so coarse as "garbage" in

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the presence of my innocent little unsophisticated Letitia, I decided that the time for protest had indeed arrived.

"Mrs. Dinsmore," I said—not even "Aunt Julia"—"I must really ask you to avoid such disgusting words and topics, or, if you must mention them, to do so to me alone. I can stand it—perhaps. But it is not nice for your niece. There may be such a thing as garbage in the world—I believe that there is—but one does not care to allude to it at home."

I looked at Letitia. A slight expression of disgust manifested itself on her face, although she tried for my sake to conceal it.

"It is a word that has come to us, Archie, from the old French *garbe*," she said quickly, with her own admirable tact. "It was once more disgusting than it now seems to be. Americans use it to express kitchen refuse or anything of that sort. Of course, our cook will have no refuse, for we shall get a good one. Probably, in low, unrefined households they do have refuse. It is possibly quite general—for average people do not understand the refinement of living. Aunt Julia meant nothing, I am sure."

Letitia, the sweetest and most diplomatic girl I have ever met, rose and kissed Aunt Julia, and I was bound to feel mollified. Not that Aunt Julia was in

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the least upset by my dignity. In fact, she was convulsed with laughter, but it was the same sort of laughter that I prefer to call a snortch, or a sniffth.

"If you ever eat oranges," she persisted in continuing, "what are you going to do with the peel? And your potato skins? And your melon rinds? And your old bones? And your tin cans? And your grocery boxes? That is what we unrefined people call garbage. But I dare say that you and Letitia will put it all in your drawing-room and make a cozy corner of it, or tie it up with blue ribbons. You silly children!" she cried, drying the laughter from her eyes, "if you weren't so amusing I could be angry with you."

Letitia looked at me. I looked at Letitia. She put her index finger to her lips to signify silence. It dawned upon us both that Aunt Julia—poor old thing—was cursed with the terrible commodity known as the "sense of humor." That is the way it always manifests itself. It is irrelevant laughter at serious subjects. My opinion is that it is a disease, and that a remedy for it will be found one day. They seem to be discovering that remedy in the comic papers, which no longer, I have heard, appeal to the afflicted.

Letitia went on reading *De Amicitia*; I renewed my acquaintance with Goethe, and Aunt Julia fell

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asleep with a book in her hands. I couldn't help seeing that it was called *Hints to Housewives*. Certainly Letitia's only relative was a bit disenchanting.

CHAPTER II

It was while we were honeymooning at Niagara, that Aunt Julia, in a letter dated from her home, at Tarrytown-on-the-Hudson, wrote to tell us that she had secured a cook for us, a colored woman, who had been highly recommended, and whom we should find awaiting us when we took possession of our cunning little domicile.

"I need not say, my dear Letitia," she wrote, "that a good servant is merely the result of a sensible and far-seeing mistress. Be firm with her, but not necessarily unsympathetic. Remember that the servant-girl question and its many evils constitute a grave national problem. I think you may consider yourselves lucky. Anna Carter appears to be an excellent servant."

This letter reached us the day before we returned to New York. Letitia read it aloud to me at breakfast as we sat before our morning eggs. It had a prosaic sound, but—well, morning eggs are not freighted with romance. Unfortunately, we were neither of us built for a diet of rose-leaves and dew-

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drops, delightful though they would have been, during the honeymoon. I am, however, bound to say that Letitia's extremely healthy appetite did not disenchant me. Nor, when I returned for a second egg, furtively during the first week, but more boldly later on, did Letitia repine at my materialism. One thing we did avoid—and that was the distasteful discussion of food. We ate what was placed before us without comment. Only once was this tacit rule broken. It was when, at dinner, Letitia rompingly annexed an evil oyster. Even then, she merely uttered a little cry of pain—which went to my heart—and dropped the subject; also the oyster.

"It is really awfully good of Aunt Julia," she said, pretending not to notice that I had arrived at egg number three. "She is a dear, good old soul. I am delighted at the prospect of a colored maid. Aren't you, Archie?"

"They are always very good-tempered and docile," I replied, "and with you, Letitia, any girl will be exceedingly happy. Ah, in the years to come, Anna Carter may be our 'old retainer,' to be pensioned off. Think of her weeping, and begging to be allowed to remain with us—clinging to us, as it were, and even offering to stay without wages."

"Which I should never allow,"—Letitia's tone was

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wonderfully firm—"I can't imagine how self-respecting people permit such a thing. They always do it in plays. I shan't countenance it. If Anna persists in staying with us, when she is too old to work, then she shall have exactly the same wages. Am I not right, Archie?"

"Always," I cried admiringly; "always, my dear girl."

"I think," said Letitia musingly, "I think a colored maid always looks so neat and attractive in a plain black dress, buttoned down the front, and a white cap—something fluffy and lacey—a wide, stiff, white collar and pretty cuffs. I shall dress Anna Carter like that. I have quite made up my mind to it. Oh, Archie," she went on rapturously, "don't you think that the *bonnes* in Paris—you see them in the Champs Elysées, and everywhere—look perfectly lovely in the caps with the long satin ribbons trailing to the ground?"

"But they are nurses, dear," I suggested, just for the sake of arguing with my little wife.

"That doesn't matter at all," she cried triumphantly. "There's no law to prevent our dressing Anna in just that style, if we like, is there, Archie? You must admit that there isn't. I shall get her a pretty cap, with yards of olive-green ribbon, to match

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the burlap on the dining-room wall. Isn't it a charming idea? And colored people love a bit of finery—a ribbon or so. I can imagine her delight. I hope she isn't fearfully colored—an unbecoming shade—as green would be such a bad match. We should be obliged to have red, and that would be so glaring with the green walls. I can't help feeling a bit sorry—since we have heard from Aunt Julia—that we didn't have red burlap in the dining-room. But one can't think of everything, can one, Archie?"

"No, dear," I said soothingly. "You are a wonderful little woman to have thought of all this."

"And I do hope," she went on, "that Anna has a black dress, buttoning down the front. I have set my heart on it, Archie. It may be a trifle, but somehow or other, those old-fashioned buttoned bodices look so comfortable and homelike."

We journeyed exultantly back to New York, eager to get to our home. We could scarcely wait. To be sure, the hotel at Niagara was delightful. We had the "bridal suite" and all the luxuries that money could command—for a honeymoon comes but once to people with our ideas. Still this hotel life, even under such advantageous circumstances, palled upon us. We did not care for sight-seeing, and the pastimes of the hayseed mind. The fact that the Falls happened to

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be there, brought little satisfaction to us. We stayed at the hotel most of the time, and tried to imagine that it was home. Letitia read Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *The Responsive Epistles of Aulus Sabinus*. Aunt Julia had given us Hall Caine's *Eternal City*, and Marie Corelli's *Temporal Power*, but Letitia threw them from the window of the train. They took up so much valuable room. They were mute testimony to a disorderly mind, she said, and I quite agreed with her.

On our way back Letitia announced that she had sent a telepathic message to Anna Carter. She sat quite motionless for ten minutes, during which time she tried to impress Miss Carter's mind with a picture of ourselves.

"Sometimes it works," she said, "and sometimes it doesn't. It all depends upon the psychic endowment of the recipient. Some of the negroes have an exceptional psychic equipment. At any rate, Archie, it doesn't cost anything but the mental effort. Telepathy is cheaper than telegraphy. Anna will probably know that we are coming."

"I think a wire would have been surer, dear," I ventured. "I really don't mind the expense. I don't want my little girl to be too laboriously economical."

At the Grand Central Station we parted for the

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first time since our wedding—I, to set forth for my office in West Twenty-third Street, where I was junior partner of a profitable little publishing house, which would ultimately offer my *Lives of Great Men* to the world; Letitia to go home. How sweet the word sounded! In reality, I could have postponed my visit to the office until the next day. But I was anxious to savor the delight of “going home” to Letitia at the conventional hour. I wanted to see what it was like—this return to a sweet, expectant little wife, eagerly looking for me out of the window, while the “neat-handed Phyllis” prepared a cozy dinner. Letitia quite understood why I went to the office, and she was delighted at the pretty subterfuge.

It was almost impossible to sink my mind to the dull level of business. They must have found me singularly unresponsive at the office. The details of the publishing business seemed unusually sordid, and I am afraid I spent most of the time looking at my watch, and waiting for the moment when I could legitimately rejoin Letitia. My partner, Arthur Tamworth, evidently regarded me as a joke, and uttered various pleasantries of the usual caliber. However, I asked him up to dinner one night during the week, and he accepted the invitation with gusto.

At five o'clock I left the office, and half an hour

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later I arrived at my dainty little uptown apartment. Sure enough, Letitia was looking out of the window on the third floor and waving a handkerchief. Regardless of appearances, I kissed my hand, overjoyed at the sight of domesticity realized. Briskly I reached the elevator, and almost knocked down a most remarkable looking lady who was stepping out. I begged her pardon abjectly. She wore one of those peculiar veils, with an eruption of large, angry, violet spots, through which I could see that she was colored. Her dress was of mauve silk, and her hat was a veritable flower-garden of roses, violets, and lilies of the valley. She chuckled coonily at my apology and pursued her way.

"Who on earth is that?" I asked the elevator boy. That official seemed tired. He answered indifferently: "Somebody's cook, I suppose."

I couldn't help laughing. "Somebody's cook!" I repeated. "Who in the world would own a cook like that?" It was an amusing idea, and I quite enjoyed it.

Letitia opened the door herself, which was charming and unconventional. She wore an exquisite little dinner dress of pink taffeta (I believe) trimmed with white chiffon (I imagine). Her neck and arms gleamed in enchanting evening revelation. We had

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both resolved always to "dress" for dinner. Probably Aunt Julia would accuse us of our favorite pastime of "aping," but we had not discussed the matter with her. "Dressing for dinner" was merely a little delicate formality that cost nothing at all. We looked upon it as a mutual courtesy—one of those small refinements that mean so much to the well-bred mind. Even when we were entirely alone, evening dress was to be *de rigueur*, as they say in plebeian circles.

"Oh, Archie!" cried Letitia, "I'm so glad you've come, dear. It must have been at least a week since we parted. Isn't the 'home' lovely? Oh, I can scarcely believe it is mine. Now, run away and dress, like a good boy, and then we'll talk."

I struggled into my evening clothes. My new dinner coat was a particularly fetching garment, and I flattered myself, as I emerged from my room—it seemed smaller than ever—that there was something distinctly patrician about me.

Letitia was in the drawing-room with Ovid. A lamp with a red shade cast a rosy light upon her. Anything prettier than this picture I have never seen. I went in rather coyly, and fell over the tiger-head, at which Letitia laughed merrily—still the same, bright, unchanged little girl. When I had picked myself up, I looked out a channal between

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chairs, stools, sofas and what-nots, and plowed myself through it gingerly, until I reached Letitia.

"Now, dear girl," I said, "tell me everything. Begin with Anna Carter."

She took my hand as I sat beside her on the sofa. "Well," she started, "Anna was quite surprised to see me. She had not received my telepathic message. You remember I sent it at 11:32 this morning. But it appears that she was singing at that time. Isn't it fun, Archie? When I arrived, I found Anna at the piano practising her scales."

"How extremely—er—disrespectful!"

"Nonsense," laughed Letitia, "it seems that she belongs to a choral society and is first soprano. You know, Archie, I thought it best to be sympathetic at first. So I listened to her. I imagined that she was going to apologize for being discovered at the piano. But she didn't. She merely explained. The choral work will render it necessary for her to go out every night—"

"But, my dear—"

"Don't interrupt, Archie. After dinner, you know, we really don't need anybody. The old rigid idea of mewing a girl up in her room all evening is a bit out of date—don't you think so, dear, in these enlight-

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ened days? And isn't it much better to know that a cook is a woman above the usual old-time, sordid, servant brand? Her voice is really beautiful. She told me that they are rehearsing the *Messiah* for Christmas Eve. I was quite impressed with her."

"What does she look like?" I was a bit sullen, as so much oddity perplexed me.

"Well," Letitia replied, "she didn't expect us, as my telepathic message miscarried. It was a pity, after all, dear, that I didn't take your advice and send a wire. Anna did not wear a black dress buttoned down the front. Probably she will appear in that to-morrow. I found her in mauve silk—really magnificently made, and her hair was done pompadour. She looked just like one of Williams and Walker's girls in *In Dahomey*."

"Mauve silk!" I cried in surprise, "why Letitia, just as I was entering the elevator to come up here, I fell against a most remarkable looking coon in mauve, with a veil, and a hat like the Trianon gardens at Versailles."

"It was Anna!" cried Letitia merrily. "She had to go out very early to-night, as the rehearsal was called for seven o'clock. You needn't look so vexed, Archie. This is surely our festival time, and why

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shouldn't Anna be in it? Time enough for discipline later. You silly boy, to frown and pout in that way—”

Letitia kissed me, and I felt quite ashamed of my momentary ill-temper. I must have inherited an ugly propensity for slave-driving. Here I was, forgetting that this was our first night at home, because, forsooth, our cook had gone out in mauve silk to sing!

“What about dinner?” I asked, and I succeeded in smiling.

“It's all right, you ravenous person,” she replied. “To-night, Anna has provided us what she calls a delicatessen dinner. I don't know what it is—but I left it all to her. She suggested it, and was astonished when I didn't know what it meant. She told me that it is very popular in New York, and that she can always get us one, even if she should have to go out earlier. I dare say it's lovely, Archie. She has laid it out in the dining-room, and I haven't looked at it, because I thought it would be jollier for us to make our acquaintance with the delicatessen dinner together. Anna isn't a bit servile, or humble, and I rather like that. I hate to see these women cowed. Not for a moment did Anna seem cowed.”

My good spirits returned. After all, it was ex-

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ceedingly delightful to listen to my loquacious little wife, as she sat there in her pretty evening clothes. The idea of the delicatessen dinner—whatever it might be—alone with Letitia, in our newly-acquired home, was simply captivating.

We went into the dining-room, arm-in-arm, and I almost wished that there was somebody there to snapshot us. My wife, with her blonde hair beautifully arranged, and her soft, pink silk draperies, with the white swirls of chiffon, was a vision of loveliness; and beside her, in my immaculate white waistcoat and admirable *pique* shirt, I afforded a sympathetic contrast.

The dining-room, with its green burlap and handsome furniture, was absolutely correct, and in the glow of the electric lights looked like fairy-land. The effect was somewhat marred by the appearance of the festive board. It was scarcely festive.

“Isn’t it odd?” cried Letitia.

And it was. On a quaint little thin wooden plate, was a mound of very cold looking potato salad. On another of these peculiar little dishes, were half a dozen slices of red sausage with white lumps in it. On a third wooden dish reposed two enormous pickles, very knobby and green. A loaf of bread lurked at

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one end of the table. Two plates and a knife and fork apiece completed the service, with a pitcher of water and two glasses.

"Where is our pretty dinner set, I wonder?" asked Letitia; "I don't remember these funny little wooden dishes. And—what's in that paper parcel?"

The paper parcel, by the loaf of bread, had escaped our notice. Letitia opened it, and revealed an immense piece of Gruyère cheese, very hole-y, and appetizing looking, and moist, but appearing to lack a cheese dish, and the necessary table equipment.

"What a strange way of laying a table!" I remarked rather gloomily, feeling decidedly small in my satin-lined dinner-coat, and *piqué* shirt-front.

"It is rather like camping out," said Letitia, in a perplexed voice, "but perhaps this is merely the *hors-d'oeuvres* course. Anna said something about an ice-box. Let's investigate, dear. It really is fun, though, isn't it?"

Letitia led the way to the kitchen, her pink silk dress rustling musically. A few moments before, I had wished for somebody to snapshot us. But as we stood, peering into the ice-box, in our rigid evening dress, I felt rather relieved that we were alone. I should have hated Aunt Julia to have been there. In

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the ice-box there was nothing but ice and one bottle of ale, part of which had been consumed. The ice-box seemed awfully cold and we shivered, though we naturally shouldn't have expected an ice-box to be warm. Returning to the dining-room, rather meditative, and serious, and amazed, we sat down to table. There seemed to be such a quantity of table. It was almost appalling.

"You must buy a plant, Archie," said Letitia. "Aunt Julia always has a fern, or something, in the middle of the table. It looks so dressy."

I refrained from saying that Aunt Julia also had other things on the table. That would have been unnecessary. After all, this was a novelty, and it is only hopelessly conservative minds that ruthlessly reject innovation.

And in spite of all, our first delicatessen dinner passed off gaily enough. In fact, the potato salad was delicious and we both agreed that Anna Carter was certainly a good cook. We were hungry, and the slices of sausage disappeared very quickly. We ate the pickles, not as a relish, but desperately, as solid food. They were almost a course, by themselves.

"I'm really glad, Archie," said Letitia, "that Anna is out. This is so amusing, and for our first night at

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home, so appropriate. It would have been embarrassing to have had Anna hovering around, passing things."

Although it occurred to me that Anna would have found very few things to pass, I did not say so. My mind had righted itself, and I was enjoying myself. The bread was fresh and appetizing. Never had I eaten so much bread, and with the hunks of Gruyère cheese I felt almost like a day-laborer. All I needed was a clasp-knife and a red handkerchief. I mentioned this to Letitia, and we both laughed so heartily that we forgot everything but our mirth.

"My dear old day-laborer in a Tuxedo coat!" said Letitia.

"And my dear old day-laborer's wife in low neck!" I added, catering to her fantasy.

It really was very jolly. I don't believe that we could have been any jollier had there been ten courses, winding up with a *parfait au café* and a *demi-tasse*. Instead of these, we finished our dinner with the remainder of the pickles and a nice glass of cool water. Letitia drank my health and I drank hers. We clinked glasses in the continental fashion. Then we waited, for we couldn't dispossess our minds of the belief that there was something to follow. I wouldn't

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admit to Letitia that I felt a trifle—er—incomplete; while Letitia certainly made no such confession. Yet there was a something lacking—an indescribable finishing touch. The delicatessen dinner undoubtedly lacked a finishing touch. It was all beginning. The appearance of the table after dinner was even more eccentric than we had found it at first sight. The empty wooden dishes, the paper that had held the Gruyère, and the two mere plates, had no suggestion of rollicking dissipation. Nor did they even suggest an overweening domesticity.

Letitia, at last, rose from the table and I did the same. I advanced to the door and opened it for her, and she passed into the drawing-room, leaving me alone to enjoy a whiff or two of my cigarette. We determined to keep up the etiquette of refined life in its every ramification. The door of the bath-room stood wide open and rather spoiled the illusion. But Letitia did not notice it. I saw her pass down the hall like a queen, her head in the air, and her pink silk dress *froufrou-ing* deliciously.

I threw myself back in an arm-chair, and sighed luxuriously. Then, before joining Letitia, I donned my smoking-jacket, and felt exquisitely at home. This was comfort, such as the maddened bachelor, in

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his infuriated solitude, can scarcely imagine. The petty cares of life took unto themselves wings and fled.

Letitia, in the drawing-room, awaited me anxiously. We were both inclined to look upon the prescribed separation of the sexes after dinner as a relic of barbarism. But it was a polite relic, and we had no intention of shirking it. She looked up from her Ovid as I entered, and then, rising, she threw her arms around me and kissed me.

It was eight o'clock, and we had a long evening before us. I had promised myself a holiday from my *Lives of Great Men* to-night. Letitia had guaranteed entertainment, and this took the form of reading a translation of Ovid, aloud. She would have preferred to entertain me in the original, but excellent Latin scholar though I was, I clamored for a translation. With one's wife, a man can be perfectly frank. Ovid, in the original, was a trifle—heavy.

She read on, and on—and still on. "Banquets, too, with the tables arranged, afford an introduction; there is something there besides wine for you to look for. Full oft does blushing Cupid, with his delicate arms, press the soothed horns of Bacchus there present. And when the wine has besprinkled the soaking wings of Cupid, there he remains and stands over-

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powered on the spot of his capture. He, indeed, quickly flaps his moistened wings, but still it is fatal for the breast to be sprinkled by love. Wine composes the feeling,—”

The clock struck ten. I interrupted Letitia rather irrelevantly. “My dear girl,” I said, “I hate to be so prosaic, but I really feel horribly empty.”

She looked at me rather oddly, I thought. “You feel empty?” she queried; “what an atrocious expression, Archie. If you mean by that, that you are hungry—”

“I am, Letitia, ravenously hungry. In fact, I feel quite faint. I can’t think of Ovid, but only of supper. Oh, Letitia, a team of deviled kidneys—”

“Don’t,” she cried, “don’t. I can’t bear it. Isn’t it disgraceful, Archie? I, too, am simply starving. It must be that bracing atmosphere of Niagara. It has made plow-boys of us. Never before have I felt that Ovid was a trifle—er—inadequate. Yet we have dined, Archie. We have partaken of a delicatessen dinner. We ate everything—”

“I believe,” I said feverishly, “that there was a little bread left. We did not eat the entire loaf, Letitia. I am quite sure that there was a heel—a crust —on the table. It caught my eye. Shall we—shall we go and see?”

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We went back to the dining-room, *not* arm-in-arm. And truly enough, we discovered that half a loaf was indeed better than no bread. I cut the crust in two and nobly gave Letitia the larger piece—nobly, but I am bound to say, enviously. Once more I felt relieved that there were no camera fiends to intrude upon our privacy. Letitia, in her *décolleté* pink silk gown, eating dry bread with a famished expression, seemed unconventional. So did I, as I buried my teeth in the fresh, crisp crust. There was no butter. Had there been butter,—well, we should merely have eaten it. We drank some more of that nice cool water, that bubbled as I poured it from the pitcher with uplifted hand.

"And now, dear," I said, "as I am going to be hungry again in five minutes—I feel it coming on—I think I'll go to bed, and forget it."

"We—we—can't go to bed yet," murmured Letitia, "we must wait for Anna. She has no latch-key, and can't get in—"

"Can't get in?" I exclaimed—and I'm afraid I was testy—"surely she intends to conform to the rules of all well-appointed establishments—"

"Now you are wrong, dear," said my wife nervously. "It is not her fault that she has no latch-key. She

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asked for one. Yes, Archie, she even demanded it. It was very considerate of her. It is quite impossible for her ever to be back before midnight, and she hated the idea of keeping us up. It was very nice of her, and you shouldn't misjudge people, Archie. To-morrow, we will all have latch-keys. At present, we are without them, so I couldn't lend her one."

"Then there is an hour and a half to wait—"

"Oh, Archie,"—Letitia's eyes filled with tears—"you are getting to be a regular—husband! You talk of waiting an hour and a half—alone with me—as though it were a hardship. Oh, I'm so sorry. I never could have believed—"

A stinging sense of remorse overcame me. I could have bitten out my tongue for those foolish words. I explained that it was not the hour and a half of waiting with Letitia that annoyed me; I protested that it was the principle of the thing; I insinuated that I was unstrung, and still hungry; I—but I fancy that Letitia understood. She smiled again, and declared that she was too sensitive—and also a bit hungry. So we went back to the drawing-room, and once more immersed ourselves in the intellectual contemplation of Venus, and Paris, and Cupid, and Diana, and Bacchus, and Thalia,—with minds out-rushing to Anna Carter.

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Shortly after midnight the electric bell pealed and Letitia flew to the door.

"It's Anna!" she cried joyously, as though it could possibly be anybody else.

Miss Carter glided in, enormous and imposing. She almost filled the hall. Letitia and I were obliged to lean tightly against the wall in order to let her pass. She surveyed Letitia's costume in bland astonishment.

"Say!" she exclaimed, "don't you jes' look too cute for words! My! Ain't it stylish?"

"To-morrow you must have a latch-key, Anna," said Letitia majestically. "You can now retire."

The mauve silk dress made twice as much rustle as Letitia's. Its owner passed to her room, humming in a very exhilarating manner. My wife and I, a trifle awed, moved rather gloomily toward our own apartment.

"An egg apiece, and some cawfee in the morning, I suppose."

The words floated in to us. They came from Anna's room. Letitia looked at me, and I looked at Letitia. Certainly our handmaiden was neither abject nor cowed. Yet we were bound to uphold the spirit of independence, the very backbone of our institutions.

"Anna!" called Letitia. I noticed a timid inflec-

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tion in her voice but as I said nothing myself, I was unable to notice anything similar in my own.

"Never call to me," Letitia ventured to remark, as cook appeared with her mauve silk bodice unbuttoned, revealing a pair of scarlet corsets, "always come. I am not at all inaccessible," she added loftily. "Yes, eggs and coffee will do for to-morrow. We shall breakfast at—"

"Nine," interrupted Anna.

Letitia pondered for a moment, and then nodded her head assentingly as Anna departed. I felt relieved that she left when she did. She was slowly disrobing, as she stood before us, and I anticipated a catastrophe if she remained two minutes longer.

"Nine is awfully late, Letitia," I said, "I really ought to be at the office at eight—"

"I don't want Anna to think you are a bricklayer, dear," asserted Letitia. "One never hears of really nice people breakfasting at such an ungodly hour. You see, she herself suggested nine. Evidently, Archie, she has been in good families. Later on, I can always explain to her that we desire an earlier meal. But just at first—"

"But, my dear girl," I said weakly, "you are really mistaken in your notion that it is only the bricklayer

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world that rises in the early morning. The best people do it. Why, Gladstone was at his desk every day at six—”

“Oh, Gladstone!” she protested with a smile, dismissing the late right honorable gentleman from her consideration, as though he were not a mere mortal of flesh and blood, with everyday sensations; “you mustn’t mention Gladstone, dear. If you were Gladstone, you could afford to do as you liked—to have your breakfast at midnight, and indulge in other eccentricities.”

This was a bit irritating. Naturally, I knew I was not quite in the same class as the gentlemen who have made history, but one does not care to be reminded of that fact by one’s wife. Even in jest, such a remark seemed unnecessary. But it was not a matter to argue. I took no further heed of it, and turned to the more vital question of our cook.

“Don’t you think that she is extremely familiar—”

“Well, dear, perhaps friendly,” said Letitia. “I think I prefer it to servility. These bashful, deferential women are probably sneaky and deceitful. Still, of course, I shall not permit her to be as friendly as she was to-night. One must have discipline.”

Letitia was combing out her hair before the silver, beveled mirror. I watched the comb as it strayed

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through the shining golden strands. I was soothed by the sight, that appealed to my sense of the artistic.

"To-morrow, dear," I said, "I suppose you will give her the cap with the olive-green ribbons trailing the ground, and inquire about the black dress buttoned down the front?"

Letitia was silent. She tugged at a refractory bit of hair and not until it had earned its right to pass through the comb, unmolested, did she speak.

"I was thinking, Archie," she said reflectively, "that some girls attach so much more importance to little matters of that sort, if a man—if a man puts it to them. Aunt Julia has often told me that she would have had a much easier time if there had been a man in the house. Perhaps, Archie, you would like to—"

"Not at all, Letitia," I remarked with emphasis, "not for worlds, dear, would I interfere in your household matters. It is good of you to suggest it, Letitia, and to permit me the luxury of meddling. But no, dear,"—in tones of noble self-sacrifice—"I shall refrain."

"Well, then, to-morrow," she said pensively, "I will attend to the matter. No doubt Anna will be delighted. And, Archie, she has just the sort of face that would look well beneath a cap."

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"I didn't like her in the hat trimmed with Trianon gardens," I muttered with strange persistence.

"Perhaps it was a bit elaborate," Letitia agreed.
"But now, Archie, I'm sleepy, and—let us drop Anna.
Next week, perhaps, I shall buy her a pretty little
black bonnet, tied with strings, under the chin. I in-
tend to treat her nicely and generously and—"

"I know I shall emaciate during the night," I
couldn't help declaring, as I switched off the light,
"I'm as hungry as a hunter, and—and—we finished
the bread!"

CHAPTER III

"Since Eve ate apples, much depends on dinner." If Byron, whose genius few will deny, can make such a remark, there is no need for me to apologize for dwelling upon a topic that long-haired dreamers, with bad digestions, might call niggledy-piggledy. In fact, I have no intention of so doing. It has long been my idea that dinner is not so much a mere matter of material indulgence, as of artistic communion, to which food is an accompaniment. The fact that the very best music, cruelly harmonized, must distress—that Melba, Calvé, and Nordica warbling to a discordant accompaniment, would produce nausea—can certainly need no discussion. It is a fact that is self-evident. It has an Euclidian Q.E.D-ness that is instantly apparent.

I told Letitia that I was not going to emulate the example of so many men and treat myself each day to a choice luncheon in town. That has always seemed to me to be a greedy process. Better—far better is it—to return to one's home at night, hungry as a hunter, with an appetite for healthful food, rather

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than an abnormal craving for *suprême de volaille*. Don't you think so? I intended to save myself up for Letitia—to accumulate hunger-pangs, and bring them to her table for artistic treatment. My wife fully agreed with me, and although I brought the due amount of hunger-pangs to our first dinner at home and discovered, perhaps, that "delicatessen" food didn't treat them quite as artistically as they deserved, I was not discouraged.

My appetite next evening was really in a wonderfully unimpaired condition. I rejoiced to find that I was so healthy, and as I wended my way homewards, I looked longingly at mere apples in the street, while the peanut stands and the roast chestnut stoves almost suggested assault.

On this occasion Letitia was not at the window, and I was disappointed. Evidently she was busy and unable to look for my advent. Perhaps it was selfish of me to expect her to dance attendance upon my comings and goings, but a newly-made husband is inclined to be unduly exacting. Even when I entered the apartment there was nobody to meet me, and it was not until I reached the drawing-room that I found Letitia. She was sitting there, looking at the fireplace that the steam-heat rendered so unnecessary. If there had been glowing embers there she would have

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been gazing into them. But there were none—merely gas-logs, unlighted. On the floor by her side was a little white arrangement, around which were coiled yards and yards of olive-green ribbon. Instantly I remembered Anna's cap. I asked myself apprehensively why it was on the floor, and not on Anna?

Letitia's face was flushed; her eyes were red; her pose was listless; her manner strange. Something evil must have happened, and I sprang forward with the cry: "Letitia!"

She started, and then came forward to kiss me. Her face felt feverish, and for a moment my heart stood still and I was unable to ask for an explanation.

Letitia herself, however, came to my rescue. "I've had such a horrible time of it, Archie, that I almost telephoned for you to come back. Then, I thought you would be frightened, so I simply telepathed. And—and—that didn't work, so I determined to wait—"

The tears rushed to her eyes. I was frantic. I had never before seen Letitia like this. She had been, hitherto, so impassive, so immovable, so admirably self-controlled.

"What is it, dear?" I asked tenderly, thinking up dozens of possible catastrophes.

"That!" she replied tremulously, pointing to the cap on the floor. "Archie, I bought it this morning,

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trimmed it with seven yards of the finest ribbon I could get, and then—when I offered it to Anna, I was insulted—grossly insulted—although—although she told me that I—I, Archie—had grossly insulted her. Oh, I shall never forget it.”

“I don’t understand, dear. Please explain—when you feel calmer.”

“I’m calm, now,” she asserted, with a telltale gulp. “First of all, dear, when I gave her the cap and told her that I hoped she would always wear it—as it matched the burlap in the dining-room so well—she burst out laughing. Oh, how she laughed! She put her hands to her sides—akimbo, I think they call it—and made such a noise that I was afraid. Oh, that coon laughter! And, then, Archie, what do you think she asked me? You would never guess. What she meant I can’t quite figure out, but she asked me if I thought—if I thought—”

“Tell me, Letitia.”

“She asked me if I thought she was a blooming circus! A blooming circus, Archie! She told me that if I hadn’t a quarter to go and see a variety show, she would lend me one. The humiliation of it! Then she said that she wasn’t going to do any ‘vaudeville turn’ here. Vaudeville turn, if you please, Archie. She told me that I had airs and manners ‘to burn’—

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which I imagine must be slang. Nothing would induce her to put on the cap. She said it was a merry-andrew affair, and though I explained to her that in Paris such caps were quite the thing, it had no effect on her. In fact, she almost told me that I lied, for she declared that she had been in Paris herself and had never seen such degradation."

"Had she been in Paris, Letitia?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, dear," replied Letitia, brushing back her disheveled hair, "in Paris, Kentucky. She was born there. Poor girl! When I realized that she was quite ignorant, I felt sorry for her. I said to her in a very gentle voice: 'Anna, I wanted you to wear this cap, because I thought it would look so well with the nice black alpaca dress that I am going to give you.' On the spur of the moment, Archie, I had decided to present her with a black alpaca dress—"

"And then—?"

"And then," continued Letitia, "she turned on me again. I could keep the black alpaca dress, she said, until she was ready for the Old Ladies' Home. That was the livery there, she informed me. No black dresses for her. Red was the only thing worth living for, she said, and mauve came next. She insisted that she wasn't working for black alpaca dresses. If

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she so far forgot her dignity as to go out to domestic service, it was because she needed silk gowns, and flower hats—”

“She saw you were young and inexperienced,” I said bitterly, “and she was just imposing. I think I’ll go and have a talk with her—”

“You can’t,” cried Letitia nervously, “she’s out. Oh, I’m so glad she’s out, for I was really frightened, Archie, and can’t forget her as she stood there—just where you are—in an old weather-beaten black silk skirt with half the beads on, and a bright red jersey with half the buttons off.”

“She must go!” I exclaimed imperiously. “She must go.”

“No, Archie, no. The matter has been settled in an amicable way. Just as she was leaving me she burst out crying, and I felt most horribly guilty. I have no idea why I felt guilty for I had merely intended to be kind, though firm, as Aunt Julia said. Still, I felt guilty. Half an hour after she came back, quite lively, and dressed to go out, in the mauve silk, with the flower hat. She told me not to be angry, and not to worry—that sometimes when she was unstrung, she was taken that way; that she hadn’t really meant anything, as she knew I was only joking about the

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cap and the black dress. I felt so relieved, Archie, it was a weight off my mind."

"And dinner?" I carefully tried to suppress a few pangs that were rioting.

"She was so upset, dear, that I really believed that she would go without even thinking of dinner. But I wronged her, for she didn't. She is not really a bad girl—merely odd, some one to study psychologically. In spite of her hysterical condition she has prepared dinner—another delicatessen dinner. I hope you won't mind, dear."

I sank wearily into an arm-chair. "I had an apple for luncheon, Letitia," I said with a yearning for sympathy; "one apple, and nothing more. What did you have?"

"Anna boiled me an egg," she replied; "it was really beautifully cooked, and I had some bread, and butter, and coffee. I wanted tea, Archie, but Anna had forgotten to get any in the house, as she prefers coffee. Isn't it funny, Archie? She says she simply can't drink tea—it nauseates her—and that she is quite famous for her coffee—"

"Letitia," I interrupted, "I don't think I could undergo another delicatessen dinner. The potato salad was certainly very nice, so were the pickles—as ap-

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petizers. But," with a weak attempt at humor, "I really couldn't give them an encore. Let's go out to dinner. Let's put on our things, and go down to the Martin—"

Letitia clapped her hands. "How gorgeous!" she cried ecstatically, "what a lovely idea!"

"It seems silly," I said, "to abandon our home as soon as we get into it, doesn't it, Letitia? Here we are dining out before we've dined in—"

"But, Archie," suggested Letitia triumphantly, "Aunt Julia says that nearly all New Yorkers dine at restaurants, when it is cook's night out—"

"In our case, dear,"—with a little sarcastic inflection—"every night appears to be cook's night out. So we really ought to subscribe to a restaurant—"

"That is unjust, Archie. We have been at home two nights only. Last night we really did enjoy the novelty of the delicatessen dinner, and to-night there is another waiting for us. If it hadn't been for the cap with the ribbons—which was an accident—this second delicatessen dinner wouldn't have occurred. And I'm sure—"

"Well, to-morrow night we dine at home, Letitia," I remarked rather haughtily, "for I have invited Arthur Tamworth, who is quite an epicure. When we get back from the restaurant we will arrange a

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little menu, and Anna can then give us a taste of her quality."

"And I dare say that she will," said Letitia, bestowing a kiss upon me. "Probably she is an exceedingly good cook. We are paying her heavy wages, Archie—the wages of a very good cook, Aunt Julia says. I don't fancy that Anna is the woman to sail under false colors—"

"Unless mauve be a false color," I interposed wittily, and then we both laughed and good temper was restored. Like a couple of children, we went gaily off to the restaurant, with ne'er a thought of the cold sausage and the buff salad that graced our own mahogany.

It was a very long and well-furnished dinner, but it was not too long for us. We were famished. At various times I have seen Letitia "toy" with her food. I have often told her that she merely coquettled with her meals. But now she labored strenuously, and this dinner was a serious affair. We were both too busy even to talk. The waiters looked at us in amazement, as they removed dish after dish, with naught to tell the tale of its quality. It was even alarming. It was not until we had arrived at the coffee that we paused in our mad career. Letitia glanced at me a trifle shamefacedly, I thought; I returned the glance, per-

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haps a bit abashed. Possibly she was vexed that she had shattered the rose-leaf-and-dewdrop theory, for she had certainly done so. I had never seen her in the desperation of hunger, simply battling for food.

"We *were* hungry," said Letitia, with a little sigh of greedy satisfaction, as I lighted a cigarette. And I was glad that she included me. It put her at ease and, as a matter of fact, I had been just as ardent. It was unusual—but it seemed better for her to be plural in her remarks.

"If Anna saw us," I was puffing contentedly at my cigarette, "I don't think she would suggest another delicatessen dinner. Oh, those pickles—that sausage—the écrù potato muddle! Really, Letitia—"

"I suppose that when one is positively hungry," Letitia murmured, "such food is trying. Few cooks, however, anticipate appetites like ours, dear."

Once again I was included. It was quite natural that Letitia should arraign me with herself. But the idea dawned upon me that though I had done my duty to this dinner just as nobly as had my wife—her appetite, for a fragile girl, was really more extraordinary than was mine for a full-fledged man.

As soon as we were home again, Letitia suggested that we start at once to arrange the little menu for the dinner at which Arthur Tamworth was to be pres-

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ent on the following evening. We sat in the drawing-room, although we should have preferred the cozier dining-room. In that apartment, however, the delicatessen dinner was still laid. We took one look at it and then fled. In our state of repletion it seemed too insolent to endure. Anna was not there to remove it, and Letitia's education was such that the sordid details of clearing a table were a bit beyond her.

"I wish," she said, "that we had arranged this menu before dinner. It is hard to think up things, after one has dined so well."

"Yes, dear," I assented, "soup just now is so unattractive and—er—meat palls."

"But to-morrow we shan't feel like that," she declared triumphantly, "and one must look ahead, Archie. You just smoke quietly, dear, and I'll write out the menu. Then we'll talk it over. I shall make it out in French, dear. The simplest things sound almost epicurean in French. I shall buy three very pretty menu cards to-morrow—with little artistic drawings on them, one for each of us. And I dare say that Mr. Tamworth will like to take his home with him."

"But Anna won't understand French."

"I've thought of that," said Letitia, biting her pencil. "I shall make the list out in English for Anna,

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so that she can buy the things and serve them properly. Of course, she may know French—she certainly does if she has lived in good families—but I won't rely on it. Every cook really should be proficient in the gastronomic phrases that are so popular to-day."

"Strange, isn't it, Letitia, that English and American menus should always affect French?"

"No, dear," replied my wife, "not at all. We copy the Latin countries in all the arts. Why not in that of dining? Dining is an art, and not—as we regard it in England and America—a mere vulgar physiological process."

For ten minutes Letitia thought and wrote—and wrote and thought. She looked up at the ceiling for inspiration; she glanced at me, unseeingly, and when I made a face at her, never noticed it. She sat there, working, while I idly admired her and thought what an admirable little housewife she was. For such a blue-stocking, Letitia was doing wonders, it seemed to me.

At the end of the ten minutes she had finished and, bringing her work to my chair, she sat on the tiger-head at my knee and announced with much satisfaction that her efforts had been successful.

"Listen, Archie," she began, with her paper comfortably settled on her lap. "First of all, let me say

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that I have made out a very simple dinner. I hate ostentation and glare. My idea is to be dainty and unpretentious. We don't want Mr. Tamworth to think that we are living beyond our means, but we do want him to realize the fact that we know how to be refined and inexpensive at the same time."

"Certainly. You are quite right, Letitia. Go on."

"As *hors d'oeuvres*," she continued, "we will have olives and *anchois à l'huile*. That is quite enough for a little home dinner. You write it all in English for Anna as I read it to you. Here, take this piece of paper and pencil, dear."

I wrote: "Olives. Anchovies at the oil."

"For soup," she went on, "I shall have things that sound really much better than they are, as I don't want to confuse Anna. Just two soups, Archie, *consommé julienne*, and *crème d'asperges*. I did think of *petite marmite*, but there is just a chance that Anna might fail at it, as even in Paris none but the finest *chefs* really succeed with *petite marmite*. So just put down *consommé julienne*, and *crème d'asperges*."

"Beef soup with vegetables. Cream of asparagus," I wrote. "Don't you think, Letitia, that one soup would have been enough—one thoroughly artistic and satisfactory soup?"

"No, Archie," she responded with some asperity.

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"I hate pinning people down to one thing—taking a tailor-like measure of their tastes, as it were. Doesn't it all sound horrid in English?" she queried with a laugh. "One might really fancy a little *consommé julienne*, whereas beef soup with vegetables sounds absolutely tin-can-ny, and red-handkerchief-y."

I thought of Letitia at the restaurant, just one hour previously, and realized what absolute hunger can do for a lissome little lady.

"Just one *entrée*, Archie," said she, "merely *homard naturel*. Everybody likes it, and I prefer to class it as an *entrée*. I did think of having it à la *Newburg*, but it is a bit too heavy, don't you think, dear? I don't want our dinner to be a foody affair—"

"Like that we have just finished," I interposed thoughtfully.

"No," she agreed rather reluctantly. "We were both disgracefully hungry, and—and—you needn't keep discussing that meal, for it was a meal, and *not* a dinner. Now, write down, please, as *entrée*, *homard naturel*."

"Natural lobster," emerged from my pencil tip.
"After that, a solid dish," Letitia declared. "You see, Archie, Mr. Tamworth is American, and we don't want to worry him with quail, or squab or little unsatisfactory game. I've thought it carefully over and

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it seems to me that a tiny, dainty *bifsteck aux pommes de terre* will be energetic without being squalid. What say you, boy? Don't you agree with me?"

"Beefsteak with potatoes," I wrote glibly, but even as my pencil framed the words, I shuddered. After our recent heavy dinner the thought of it seemed so arduous.

Letitia understood. "You see, it's all due to the coarseness of the English language," she insisted, "and you must remember that you are Englishing it for Anna only. I wonder," she added pensively, "if Anna would make us some of those *soufflé* potatoes—you know, Archie, those things that are all blown out, and that seem like eating fried air. They are most delicate. We used to have them every Sunday at the *pension*, in the Avenue du Roule. However, I won't tax the girl. Perhaps she may give us the potatoes in that style without being told. I fancy, dear, that she is going to surprise us. I dare say it will be a relief to her to see that we really know what good living is. I shall leave the potatoes to her."

"We may as well give her a chance," I agreed. "Personally, I would just as soon have the potatoes *maître d'hôtel*. It is very likely that Anna will prefer that method, as it is more usual."

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“And after that,” Letitia cried gaily, “nothing, but *glaces aux fraises*—”

“Strawberry ices,” I wrote.

“And a *demi-tasse*.”

“Coffee. It is very convenient in New York, dear,” I said, “Anna will not have the worry of making the ices. All she will have to do will be to order a quart and they will send it over in a cardboard box.”

Letitia shivered. “Yes, I know, Archie. It is very coarse, isn’t it? Imagine thinking of ices by the quart! Picture them in a cardboard box!”

“They speak of it in the singular here, dear. It is ice-cream. You talk of a quart of *it*; not of a quart of *them*. It doesn’t really matter, though. The taste is the same.”

“Ugh!” Letitia exclaimed, “it is very discouraging. Why people call delicious foods by such ugly titles, I don’t know. ‘A quart of ice-cream’ has such a greedy sound, whereas ‘a strawberry ice’ is pretty and artistic to the ear. But as you say, dear, it really makes no difference. But what do you think of the dinner, dear? Does it appeal to you? After all, Archie, I would sooner it pleased you than Mr. Tamworth, though he *is* the guest.”

“It is lovely,” I said enthusiastically, “and, Letitia, so are you. And you would sooner please me

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than Arthur Tamworth, oh, most charming of wives? Well, you will do that, my dear. Yet I bet that our little dinner will be a red-letter affair for Arthur."

"I shall get the menus at Brentano's to-morrow," announced Letitia, "some pretty little water-color, or etching, if possible. I don't intend to economize, Archie. Our first dinner-party—for three is a crowd, isn't it?—must, and shall be delightful."

CHAPTER IV

Before going to the office next morning, I accompanied Letitia to the florist's. She was determined to select the table decorations herself. Later on, she declared, when Anna had become acclimatized and our way of living was to her as an open book, Letitia promised to leave everything to her. We were rather surprised at the cost of the flowers Letitia coveted. Orchids and American Beauty roses appealed to her strongly, and she paid no attention to less expensive blooms. Not that I minded. This little dinner really meant a good deal to me. Besides being a personal friend of mine, Arthur Tamworth was my senior partner, and it was upon him that I relied for the publication of my *Lives of Great Men*, a work that was to make my name ring through the land and perhaps, through the ages. In fact, I delighted to do him honor, and if my motives were somewhat selfish, they were not less so than those of the majority. This is a practical age.

Letitia went home, flower-laden and smiling. She was neither when I returned at five o'clock. In fact, she seemed distinctly weary and her kiss was more

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perfunctory than any I had hitherto experienced at her lips.

"Anna is so surly, Archie," she said droopingly, "that I simply can't cope with her. She is furious at the idea of being late at her class. This was to be her great night, she says, as she was to sing *With Verdure Clad*, and she seems indignant. I was kind though firm. I insinuated—though I didn't say so—that her verdure would keep, and that my dinner must be served properly."

"Quite right, dear."

"I felt it was a sort of crisis," Letitia continued, "a kind of tide in the affairs of the household. Then her sister came, and I suggested that if Anna liked, the girl could remain and wait at table."

"But does she know how?" I asked.

"What is there to know?" queried Letitia, with a tinge of annoyance. "Anybody can wait at table. It is very simple. Anna seemed pleased, or, rather, not displeased. But she is very sulky and I have arranged the flowers on the table myself. I've never worked so hard in my life and I feel quite tired out. But I realize, dear, that one must do something useful—at least at the beginning of housekeeping. I have also placed the *hors d'oeuvres* on the table. It all looks very charming."

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"Poor Letitia!" I exclaimed, stroking her hair, "I hate the idea of your laboring. You mustn't do it again. I have no doubt but that Anna could have done it all, but as she was so cross you were right to heap coals of fire on her head. She is probably remorseful enough by this time."

"No," Letitia remarked thoughtfully, "I don't believe that Anna has a remorseful nature. The colored disposition—I mean by that the disposition of the colored people—is peculiar, Archie. When we have quite settled down, I shall study Anna, psychologically."

"In the meantime, dear," I said, airily jocular, "let us hope that the *crème d'asperges* won't be too psychological."

Letitia looked a picture in blue *crêpe de chine*, with her beautiful neck and shoulders emerging from one of those spidery lace effects that render the masculine pen impotent. Her *trousseau* contained so many evening dresses that one might have imagined that our entire life was to be spent at night, and that morning counted for absolutely nothing. Some of the orchids, remaining from the table decorations, Letitia wore at her bosom, and one exquisite American Beauty rose nestled in the golden glories of her hair.

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"You see how economical I am, Archie," she said, "for instead of throwing away the superfluous flowers, I wear them. Aunt Julia says that the essence of good housekeeping consists in utilizing everything."

We sat in the drawing-room to await Arthur Tamworth, and although we both made an admirable feint of ease and nonchalance, it was so obviously a feint that we gave it up, and simply killed time. Of course, we were both accustomed to dinners and receptions—in fact, we had been nourished on them. But other people's affairs are—other people's affairs. This was ours, and our first, and there is no use concealing the fact that we were both nervous. Letitia read Ovid, upside down, and seemed to derive intellectual entertainment from it, judging by her face. I merely looked out of the window, not to watch for Tamworth's advent, but because the window seemed to be such a fitting place to look out of.

When the bell finally rang, Letitia had the decency to adjust Ovid, and I stood by the fireplace in an unstudied, host-like way, with my hands behind me, although there had never been any warmth in that fireplace and never would be—as long as we had steam-heat for nothing.

As we waited, a colored head and nothing more

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popped in at the door, and the younger Miss Carter—for it must have been she—remarked: “There’s a man outside who wants to come in.”

“Never let any one in,” I said sternly; for there had been an epidemic of burglars, while suspicious characters simply prowled, seeking whom they might devour. “Always keep the chain on the door.”

“He says he’s come to dinner,” remarked the colored head, with a chuckle.

Letitia jumped up as though shot. I felt myself redden. Under the caption of “man” we had not recognized Arthur Tamworth. Of course, he was a man in the best sense of the word, but the best sense of the word is not polite society’s. I rushed to the door in a fever, and unchained it noisily. Arthur Tamworth stood outside looking just a trifle annoyed—but not more annoyed than I was.

“Come in, old chap,” I said, with elaborate cordiality, “we were waiting for you. The maid who opened the door was not our maid, you know—merely her sister—and—er—”

“That’s all right, Fairfax,” Arthur Tamworth declared, as he shook my hand, “I didn’t know what I had struck. Having, however, lived in New York all my life, I know something about the ladies who help. Hope I’m not late?”

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I insisted that this was Liberty Hall—a remark that is always supposed to put all at their ease. Then I escorted him to the drawing-room where Letitia stood, peerless in her blue diaphanous gown. Mr. Tamworth was so engrossed with Letitia's appearance that he did not notice the tiger-head, and tripping over it, fell at her feet. I assisted him to rise and introduced him to my wife. His fall, however, had irritated him a bit. He was much older than we were, being a somewhat portly person of fifty summers, with iron-gray hair and a florid complexion.

"I'm so sorry," said Letitia graciously, "Archie and I always fall over that tiger-head, and have really grown to like it. But it is a stupid thing—very much in the way."

"I always think, Mrs. Fairfax," Mr. Tamworth remarked, rubbing his shin, "that tiger-heads are meant to trip people up. And the worst of them is that they are always so hard. They must be stuffed with rocks."

Letitia's delightful manner, however, soon restored his equanimity. She talked to him so gracefully, so appealingly, so irresistibly, that Arthur Tamworth was under the spell of her presence long before we went in to dinner. I felt proud of her as she held—in the palm of her hand, as it were—this worldly, ro-

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tund person. The fate of my *Lives of Great Men* seemed to be settled. Mr. Tamworth did not wear evening dress, but affected that horrible garb known as a "business suit," with a rude, short coat. This annoyed me, as I was afraid that Letitia would think my friend lacking in respect. In fact, she looked extremely surprised when, just before we moved toward the dining-room, he said: "Had I known we were going to the opera to-night, Mrs. Fairfax, I should have dressed. But Archie did not tell me."

"We are not going to the opera, Mr. Tamworth," Letitia responded, her eyes betraying her astonishment. "Why should you think so?" Then, with a charming determination to make him feel comfortable, she added: "Archie and I dress for each other. I like him better than any audience at the Metropolitan, and he has the same sort of regard for me."

Wasn't it pretty? Mr. Tamworth remarked, "You're a lucky dog, Fairfax," and then Letitia took his arm, and we set forth for the dining-room, cheerful and expectant. I noticed that Tamworth took particular heed of the tiger-head this time. The dignity of our march was also impaired by the fact that the bathroom door stood wide open, and if it had not been for Letitia's presence of mind, we should all have marched in.

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Nothing could have looked more fairy-like than the dining-room, except, perhaps, fairy-land itself. Mr. Tamworth's face expanded in a pleasant smile at the mere anticipation of the dinner that awaited him. The orchids, framed in maiden-hair fern, were exquisite, and the roses in long vases of opalescent glass were fragrant as well as beautiful. At each place was a dainty menu-card, bearing misty little water-color pictures. Mr. Tamworth's was called "Children at Play," which did not seem appropriate, but was nevertheless neat and well-done.

The *hors d'oeuvres* passed off admirably. Letitia was lively, Mr. Tamworth was wonderfully loquacious, and I sat and reveled in their clever encounters of wit. Letitia and I scarcely touched the olives, and the *anchois à l'huile*, but Mr. Tamworth seemed hungry, and partook of them as though there were nothing to follow. Then Letitia touched a little bell, and after what seemed an eternity the younger Miss Carter appeared. I could not help gasping when I saw her. She wore a coffee-colored dress with bright yellow ribbons, and nestling in her woolly hair—in the style affected by Letitia—was a rose, most red and artificial. On her face was a broad grin. I looked at Letitia, and saw that she was flushed but endeavoring to overcome her vexation. Tamworth's

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gaze appeared to be riveted upon the picture of "Children at Play."

"Will you take *consommé julienne*, or *crème d'asperges?*" asked Letitia, nervously fingering her dinner-card, and trying to smile in an unconcerned way upon Mr. Tamworth.

Mr. Tamworth selected the *crème d'asperges*; so did Letitia and I. My wife whispered to the Zulu in yellow: "Asparagus soup for everybody," rather anxiously, and then turning to our guest tried to think of something to say. I say, tried to think, because, at that moment, voices were heard in the kitchen, which was as near to us as the bathroom. In fact, the voices seemed as though they were *in* the dining-room.

"They'll all take sparrowgrass soup," said the younger Miss Carter, with a loud laugh.

"Oh, they will, will they?" retorted the elder Miss Carter. "You jes' ask 'em how they're a-goin to do it. They'll take what I've made, or they'll leave it. I don't know nothin' about no sparrowgrass. She's crazy, askin' for two different soups. Here. You take in them three bowls o' veg., and no back talk. I'm sick and tired of this kind o' monkey business. You bet I am. And just you hurry, Sylvia; we're a-missin' all of our choruses, and—"

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By some horrid, demoniac freak of fate, we sat hatefully and relentlessly silent. In vain I tried to think up some remark—be it ever so banal—that would distract Tamworth's attention. I could see that Letitia was in the same quandary. Not an idea lurked in my mind. Even the weather failed. Each word from the kitchen reached us as though by megaphone. Letitia's lip trembled, as she sat, apparently racking her brain for something—anything—to say. It was too cruel.

"Take in the veg. soup, and if you drop it I'll skin you," sang out Miss Carter.

Rescue came, but it was too late. "You really have a charming little apartment, Mrs. Fairfax," said Arthur Tamworth diplomatically, "I don't know when I've seen prettier appointments."

A dainty soup-plate was placed before each of us by the grinning maiden. Sylvia, if you please—Sylvia! It was "beef soup and vegetables" with a vengeance. It stood in a solid mass in each plate and there seemed to be everything in it but soup. It approached the spoon with glutinous reluctance and appeared to be begging to be cut with a knife and put quickly out of its misery.

"Oh, I'm so sorry about the *crème d'asperges*," Letitia murmured, her lips parched, and a fever spot

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on each cheek, "I suppose that she didn't understand."

"This is delicious, Mrs. Fairfax," said Arthur Tamworth nobly, "there is nothing I like better than good *consommé julienne*. I really prefer it to the other."

We did not sip our soup, but we worked at it. It tasted like boiled everything, served up with the water. There were nasty little flecks of red and streaks of yellow in it. One expected anything, at each spoonful. Not if I had been starving, could I have eaten it. Arthur Tamworth plodded along laboriously, like a youth with his way to make in the world, and Letitia, as hostess, evidently felt bound by the rules of etiquette to do what she could. She had recovered her equanimity, wonderful little girl!

"As we were saying before dinner," she remarked, trying not to look at the odious Sylvia, as she clattered away the plates, "the modern novel does seem to have deteriorated. If you consider all these irritating romances, so vastly inferior to the splendid imaginings of Dumas, you must admit the weakness, the effeminity of such efforts to-day. It assuredly does seem as though all virility had departed from the modern band of so-called romance-weavers—"

Letitia's effort at "polite conversation" suddenly

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ceased. The *homard naturel* arrived and we could scarcely believe our eyes. Instead of the splendid crustacean that we had anticipated—the glowing macrurous delicacy that we had expected to see crouching in a jungle of water-cress—a hideous can, with a picture of a lobster on it, was placed before me. The can had been opened, and there, in poisonous looking obsequiousness, lurked our *homard naturel*.

"This is absurd," I said, and my voice shook. Tamworth was an old friend, but sometimes old friends respond to insult, apparently deliberate.

"I—I—can't understand," Letitia managed to say. "What—what is it?"

"Simply a can of lobster," replied Arthur Tamworth, with a pleasant smile; "and very good it is, too, no doubt. Suppose you assist us, Fairfax, and cease looking as though you had lost all your available relatives, and your wife's as well."

To say that I felt mortified was to put the matter mildly. The fact that Tamworth was generously trying to make the best of things irritated me the more. After all, at a little dinner, one does not want charity, even though it be supposed to "begin at home." I was too overcome to eat, though I saw Letitia frowning at me and noticed that she was partak-

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ing liberally. I was so angry that I could have torn up my dinner-card. The "Children at Play" on Tamworth's did not seem so awfully inappropriate, after all. "Children Playing at Dinner" would have been more to the point, though.

"What are your views on the servant question, Mrs. Fairfax?" asked Arthur Tamworth lightly, as he toyed with a piece of what looked like brick-red india-rubber. "Do you know"—with a smile—"that I am studying it? Positively I am."

A look of freezing severity appeared on Letitia's face. In a voice shiveringly Arctic, she asked: "What is the servant question, Mr. Tamworth? I have never heard of it. If you imagine—"

"Not at all, Mrs. Fairfax, not at all"—he made the rejoinder quickly—"I do not imagine that you will let it upset you. But, honestly, it is one of the topics of the day."

"With silly women, lacking in intellectuality," interposed my wife, with the sublimest inflection of contempt that I have ever heard. "Brainless women must talk about something. They have no interest in the life beautiful and artistic. Rather than adopt a policy of silence which would effectually cover their mental shortcomings, they discuss the kitchen and

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food. At least, I am told that they do. Personally, I do not know. I do not associate with them."

Letitia was very busy with the cold mummy, masquerading before her as *homard naturel*. She did not see the look of amusement on Arthur Tamworth's face. I saw it, however, and it was gall and wormwood to me. I hated to believe that he regarded Letitia as a joke. I had no sympathy with jokes, except when I uttered them myself, as the spontaneous bubbles of an exuberant spirit.

"Seriously, Mrs. Fairfax," continued my guest, laying aside his fork with a sigh of relief that seemed to say, "well done, thou good and faithful servant"; "it is not only the brainless ladies who talk servant. Why, some of the best people are contemplating a Women's Domestic Guild. There is, for instance, Mrs. Russell Sage—"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Letitia. "Is she the best example you can find, Mr. Tamworth? I have no doubt but that Mrs. Sage, at a pinch, could cook her own dinner. Stew, probably, followed by baked apples. Really, Mr. Tamworth—"

"I read an interview with a Mrs. Joseph Healey, the other day," said Mr. Tamworth placidly; "I cut it out. I think I have it with me. Ah, yes"—res-

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cuing a newspaper clipping from his pocket—"hark at this: 'Owing to the incompetency of servant girls, housekeepers, too, are compelled, more and more, to buy cooked food for their tables. The growth of the delicatessen business in recent years has been startling—'"

Letitia sat bolt upright, suddenly. The paragraph seemed to sear itself into my brain.

"Many families," he went on, "live almost continuously on ham and potato salad, which is usually kept in an ice-box two or three days until it is absolutely unfit to be eaten. The servant-girl question is, therefore, not only breaking up the American home, but serving to break down the national health.'"

I tried to pretend that I was not looking at Letitia. Letitia tried to pretend that she was not looking at me. The dual attempt was a failure. We each knew that we were contemplating the other.

"Perhaps it is true," said Letitia airily, "perhaps. At any rate, it reads well in the newspapers, Mr. Tamworth. Sylvia"—to the Zulu—"you can bring in the next course. It is *bifsteck aux pommes de terre.*"

When it arrived we would have given worlds to have been able to resume our discussion. It was then that we really needed to talk—and it was then that we

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couldn't! We could simply sit and gaze at the travesty. Conversation, which should be so serviceable as a stop-gap, failed us completely. All we could see was a sort of coal-black chest-protector on a large dish, and some boiled potatoes swimming in water on another.

"She didn't *soufflé* the potatoes," murmured Letitia tremulously.

"They are not even *maitre d'hôtel*," I suggested feebly.

"You see," said Letitia apologetically, as I hacked at the chest-protector furiously, "Anna is in such a hurry to get to her singing class that she is at a disadvantage—"

"Singing class!" exclaimed Mr. Tamworth, laughing. "How funny! I must make a note of it. I hope you don't mind, Mrs. Fairfax. You see, I'm really studying—"

"I do mind," retorted my wife quite irritably. "I quite see that we have given you material for study. Still, it is disagreeable to reflect that our little—"

"My dear Mrs. Fairfax," he cried, genuinely distressed, "please believe that I am not serious. I only want you to feel that I do not share your annoyance. This—why, all this amuses me. It is interesting. It

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is great. Look at my good friend, Fairfax, wearing an expression that suggests Hamlet in his most melancholy moment. Why? I ask you, why?"

"I—I—I'm glad you feel that way about it," said Letitia, with tears in her eyes, "but—but perhaps, you are just pretending—to make me feel comfortable."

"It is good of you, old chap," I muttered, feeling as abject as though I had just put out my hand for alms and Arthur had popped a nickel into it.

"How absurd!" he laughed. "Why, I'm a great diner-out, and I know all about it, and—shall I read you a bit more about the Women's Domestic Guild?"

"I don't think I could stand it," Letitia said tremulously. "Sometime, perhaps, Mr. Tamworth, but not to-night. There are still the ices—*glaces aux fraises*. They can't be burnt. They can't be boiled in water."

They were not. *They* were brought on, in a dingy cardboard box, marked with the name of the purveyor, and the legend: "Ice-cream saloon—Columbus Avenue." *They* appeared on the edge of Sylvia's finger, balanced by a loop of tape. The cardboard box oozed and perspired. The lid was stuck down. Pink splashes dripped.

"Anna says to tell you," giggled the wide-mouthed

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Sylvia, "that she got American ice-cream. The French is ten cents more, and there ain't no difference."

This time Arthur Tamworth laughed without an apology. Probably he had a sense of humor, and thought it funny to see my poor little exquisitely attired wife, sitting at the head of her orchid-laden table, and confronted with a question of "ten cents more." That is exactly what a sense of humor achieves. Again, I protest that it is a curse. Mute sympathy would have been more durable than loud mirth.

Letitia left us while we smoked. She did not go to the drawing-room, but—as I learned afterward—retired to her bedroom to weep. When we joined her later, her eyes were red and swollen. She had lowered the lights, so that this fact should not be too glaringly evident. We sat and talked. I will do Arthur Tamworth the justice to say that he was quite untroubled and made strenuous efforts to be entertaining. But the tone of our conversation suggested a house of mourning. Absolute failure had benumbed us into a sort of mental paralysis. I kept looking at the clock—longing for my guest to go. Letitia yawned persistently, although she made brave efforts to appear

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alert. But he stayed until eleven o'clock, and when he did go, remarked, with what I thought ill-timed irony, "I've had a delightful time."

"Never—never have I felt so small," Letitia almost sobbed, as soon as we were alone. "And, Archie, I feel so ill, too. That brutal lobster—I *had* to eat it, and it won't digest. Capped by the terrible beef-steak, it has nearly done for me."

"Why did you eat it? I asked querulously, "I didn't."

"If a hostess can't eat her own food, who can?" she demanded furiously. "I would have eaten it, if ptomaine germs had arisen from it, and introduced themselves. I hope I know my duty, and I hope that I am not weak enough to shirk it. Mr. Tamworth ate a lot of it."

"He'll die in the night," I suggested cheerfully, "and then good-by to my *Lives of Great Men*. It was not *homard naturel*. It was unnatural. That being the case, you might have refused it, Letitia. It would have been excusable."

"We won't argue the matter, Archie," she retorted, "I have my own ideas of what is right. To place food before an inoffensive person—though I consider your partner was a trifle offensive—and then reject it yourself, is not quite etiquette."

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"Would you eat it again to-morrow, under the same circumstances?"

Letitia shuddered. "Yes," she said promptly. Then, "No. Yes, I would. No, I wouldn't. Really, I can't say, Archie. What is the use of suggesting such an impossible case? I think I would eat it. But I don't think I could."

"Poor old girl!" I remarked sympathetically. "We'll try and forget it. I don't know how I shall dare to go to the office to-morrow, though. I dare say that Tamworth won't be there. He'll be in bed. I thought he looked rather feverish just before he left, didn't you, Letitia? His gaiety seemed a bit forced, and I noticed once or twice that he gasped as though he were in pain."

"The Women's Domestic Guild?" laughed Letitia scornfully. "A nice subject to bring up at a dinner party! I call it indecent—like washing one's soiled linen in public. Of course, there are old frumps who like that kind of topic."

"Aunt Julia?" I suggested.

"I did not mean Aunt Julia, Archie. She is not an old frump, though I admit that it was from her lips that I first heard servant question. However—I wonder if we have any ginger in the house, Archie? You shall mix me a little. It might ward off an attack.

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Perhaps a little weak whisky and water will be better."

"I'm so sorry, dear," I said. "We have discovered one thing, however. It is the utter incompetency of Anna. Out of the house she goes to-morrow. Once bit, twice shy. What do you say, Letitia?"

"Will you tell her, Archie? I'm afraid I shan't feel well enough."

"Tell her? Why, of course," I answered, nobly emphatic. "I only wish she were here now, while I have this strenuous mood upon me. Tell her? Well, I guess so."

In fact, we both believed that Miss Carter was simply waiting to be told.

CHAPTER V

"What *can* have happened, Archie?" cried Letitia excitedly next morning, as she entered the cubby-hole that I called my dressing-room and interrupted my shaving. Her face was pale and her eyes shone. "There is no breakfast laid, and—there is no Anna. I went to her room and found that she had not slept there. Evidently she did not return last night. Something dreadful must have occurred."

I put my razors carefully away, with the deliberation that great men note at moments of calamity and distress. Then I followed Letitia to the dining-room, where there was disorderly testimony to the accuracy of her information. Nothing even suggested breakfast. In fact, the remains of last night's parody on dinner confronted us and evidently declined to seek oblivion. Letitia looked aghast at the debris, but as I had just left myself enough time to dally with the matutinal bacon and tea, I could not repress my extreme annoyance. I could not—and I did not.

"But, Archie," said Letitia, noting my vexation, "while it is most irritating to find no breakfast, one

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must not forget that there is a graver problem. Where is Anna? She is a human being, Archie. We must accord her some slight consideration, even though she treated us so badly last night. She must"—Letitia's voice sank to a whisper—"she must have met with foul play."

"I doubt it, Letitia"—I felt awfully surly—"she is not the sort."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Letitia angrily. "She was an attractive girl—of her kind. You may not admire her, but colored people would. It isn't only homely girls who meet foul play. The newspapers always insist that every woman who is murdered, or waylaid, is lovely, but that is only to make the story readable. I've often thought, Archie, that the only chance many girls have to be called beautiful is to be murdered. Have you ever heard of a typewriter girl who has come to grief, and who wasn't beautiful? I haven't. Some of them are regular old crows, but as soon as they reach the newspapers they are transfigured. Crime seems to be a great beautifier. Anna may have been made away with. If so, we shall read that she was a dazzlingly charming mulatto."

"In the meantime, dear," I said patiently, "what shall we do for breakfast? Everything seems tragic, you know, on an empty stomach."

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"If I only knew how to make tea!" sighed Letitia reflectively. "I've often seen Aunt Julia make it, but I quite forget if you heat the tea-leaves and pour water over them, or if you boil them in a saucepan. Oh, how foolish I was to neglect these trifles! But I never thought I should ever have to make tea."

We were in the kitchen, where the remains of last night's mock-dinner were even more glaringly apparent. It was sickening, in the dewy morn, to see the soiled dishes and the encumbered plates. There was the piece of lobster that Arthur Tamworth left. There was my soup, in a cold, coagulated mass, on the table. There was the *bifteck aux pommes*, stark before us. Letitia, in a pink *peignoir* covered with lace, tried to fit around, but there was no room to fit in. I experienced a horrid sense of nausea, and felt willing to abandon breakfast. Fortunately, we were both young, and had not reached that downward grade leading to a placid enjoyment of breakfast. It is only the more than middle-aged who find keen physical satisfaction in the early kipper. To the young in spirit, the morning meal is but a tradition, followed with a certain amount of sycophancy.

We found some milk and eggs in unexpected places and, as I was in a hurry, we made a hasty breakfast. Letitia boiled the tea in a saucepan, and in an ecstasy

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of originality, suggested that we cook the eggs in that receptacle at the same time. It was not what one might call an artistic meal. The tea tasted like ink, and the sweet disposition of the egg was cooked out of all semblance of its own wistful, appealing nature.

"You mustn't leave me in this unsettled state, Archie," said Letitia nervously. "I couldn't stand it, dear. I—I feel quite upset. We must look through the papers and see if anything has happened to Anna. And perhaps it would be a good thing to notify the authorities. Who are the authorities, in a case like this, Archie? Not the mayor, I suppose, or the aldermen; not—er—the coroner?"

"Police headquarters, I should say"—a little doubtfully.

"Of course, she may come in at any moment," Letitia suggested, glancing rather timidly over her left shoulder. "I quite dread it. Perhaps she will return with a battered face, or bleeding profusely from a wound. It would be annoying to notify—er—the Policeman's Home, did you say?—until we are reasonably sure. There must be some penalty for uttering false alarms. Sit down, Archie, and I'll just run through the papers."

I began to realize that Letitia was veritably wrought up, and that it was no use contemplating my

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routine at the office until some light had been shed upon the seemingly untimely fate of Miss Carter. So I obeyed Letitia and sat down, while she, somewhat feverishly, took up the morning papers and plunged into their labyrinthine recesses.

“ ‘Girl decapitated by Trolley Car,’ ” she read slowly. “Let us see now: ‘The sight seemed to infuriate the mob—car struck her in the left leg—singularly beautiful blonde.’ That settles it, doesn’t it? It couldn’t be Anna. The papers will certainly call her singularly beautiful, but no reporter, whatever his political or religious conviction, could describe her as a blonde. Ah, here we are. This certainly seems to fit: ‘Woman Drops Dead in L Station—Sitting bolt upright in an elevated railroad station in Brooklyn, a woman whose identity had not been discovered by the police last night’—Archie, put on your things, and go to Brooklyn.”

“Is there nothing more, Letitia?” I asked, for I loathe Brooklyn.

She continued, moistening her lips: “‘The surgeons unable to revive her—Coma followed by death—Very handsome, elegantly dressed woman, golden hair—’ Well, evidently,” said Letitia, and it really seemed to me as though she were disappointed, “it can’t be Anna. You had better not go to Brooklyn,

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after all, Archie. Here's something else. Really the newspapers are full of clues. 'Idiot Girl Found Wandering By River—'"

"Read on, Letitia," I cried, "that certainly does sound promising."

"Half-witted girl discovered near the Harlem River, beneath the bridge, at One-Hundred-and-Fifty-fifth Street—singing snatches of song—muttering to herself.' The singing appears to point to Anna, don't you think, dear? Poor girl! Perhaps she *was* an idiot, after all, and we have been thinking such cruel things of her, just because she couldn't grapple with *crème d'asperges* and *bifsteck aux pommes*. Let us see: 'She fought desperately with the police officer—burst into fiendish laughter—threw back her veil, revealing dazzling beauty, dark hair, and face of almost appalling pallor—' That can't be Anna. I suppose that colored people feel pallor, but they certainly can't show it, can they? Here's something else: 'Scores Killed and Many Maimed in Wreck Horror.' Here's a long list of the unfortunates, but—the wreck occurred on the Illinois Central Cannon Ball Train, eighty-three miles from New Orleans."

"I am afraid, Letitia, that nothing has happened to her," I said hopelessly. "I mean by that, of course,

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that I am afraid we shan't discover anything in the newspapers."

"Isn't it exasperating?"

"Isn't what exasperating?" I asked. "You mean it is annoying that Anna wasn't decapitated by the trolley car, maimed in the wreck, or dead in the L station?"

"You are unkind, Archie," said Letitia, with tears in her eyes, "and I don't think this is a happy moment for joking. Of course you must be joking when you suggest that I am upset because—Anna hasn't had her head cut off. It isn't nice of you, dear. But I imagine that you are not quite yourself. This sort of thing does unhinge one. I wonder what we had better do? No, you can't and shan't go down-town, and leave me to receive Anna, perhaps dead on a shutter, or wet from the river, with weeds in her hair, like Ophelia; or—"

"They wouldn't bring her here, dear," I ventured, and this time I tried to be soothing, for I could see that Letitia was distraught. "They would take her to the morgue."

"Ugh!" she shuddered. "The morgue always sounds so creepy and damp. I can't associate it with Anna, who was so alive last night."

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"And so disagreeable."

"Hush, Archie. *De mortuis*—you know the rest—and perhaps she is among the *mortuis*. I think I shall go to my room, remain there in silence for ten minutes, and try to impress Aunt Julia telepathically. She could advise us, and perhaps if she knows of the plight that we are in, she might—"

"Aunt Julia!" I cried enthusiastically, "why not talk to her over the telephone? She is at Tarrytown now, and we can reach her. She is a very sensible and level-headed old lady. She is most practical. I dare say she could suggest things that would never occur to us."

"Perhaps," assented Letitia coldly. "As you say, she is very sensible. As you imply—I am not. By all means, let us consult Aunt Julia."

Poor Letitia was very inclined to be fractious, and everything I said appeared to tell against me. But I had no desire to add to her difficulties, and I explained to her what I meant. Aunt Julia was an old house-keeper and perchance in her long experience she had known this agony of the vanishing cook. If so, she would undoubtedly give us the results of her experience, and this might be of some service to us in our dilemma. It was worth trying at any rate.

"You ring her up, Archie," said Letitia, appeased,

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as we approached the instrument. "A man always sounds more important at the telephone."

"Not in a matter of cook, dear," I protested. "Aunt Julia will think I am an awful molly-coddle, if I ring her up in such a cause. No, Letitia, I will stand by you; I will not leave you until the matter is settled. But it is far preferable for you to ring up Aunt Julia. It is a household matter, isn't it, dear? I'll stay here, and—hold your hand, if you like. Now, ask for her number, and—don't be nervous."

I held Letitia's hand, which was very cold and moist, and we stood waiting to effect a communication with Mrs. Dinsmore at Tarrytown. It seemed endless, and all the time Letitia appeared to be nervously expecting an interruption—probably in the form of Anna, either dead or alive, preferably the former.

"Good morning, Jane," I heard Letitia say at last, tremulously; "will you please ask Mrs. Dinsmore to step to the 'phone? Thank you so much. Yes, I'll hold the wire." Pause. Letitia held the wire, and I held her hand. Then again: "Aunt Julia, this is Letitia—Letitia Fairfax, your niece. Yes. Oh, yes, Aunt Julia, I'm quite well, but something dreadful has happened. No. Archie is very well. It's about Anna Carter, the cook you got for us. Yesterday we gave a little dinner to Archie's partner, Mr. Tam-

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worth. At least, I should say we intended giving a little dinner. We gave something, but I don't know what it was. Anna was very surly, and disagreeable, and to-day she has disappeared. We were not unkind to her; we drove her to nothing at all. We intended discharging her, but she has vanished. We are in a dreadful state, imagining all sorts of awful things. Archie thought I had better call you up, before he went to police headquarters. Archie"—turning to me, with horror in her face—"I believe I hear Aunt Julia laughing."

At the telephone again: "Have the East River dragged? No, we never thought of that. Why are you laughing, Aunt Julia? Yes, I heard you laughing. Allow you to have a good time? If you *can* have a good time, at our expense, you are at liberty to do so. Archie"—turning to me—"she says, 'Don't get huffy.' I don't know what she means. She has just said we are a couple of fools, and ought to be spanked and put to bed. Yes, Aunt Julia, I hear you. Yes. What? Will never come back? They often, in fact, generally, go away like that when they don't like a place? You are joking, Aunt Julia. I don't believe it. Wouldn't she, for the sake of decency, and in the interests of common courtesy, tell us that she was not going to return? Yes, I did look at her room, and

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I saw no trunk or clothes. Yes. No. What do you say? Archie"—reverting to me—"Aunt Julia says that you must be a nincompoop."

"Thank her, Letitia," I murmured, unable to keep back the flush that mounted to my forehead. "Tell her we want advice, and not abuse."

Letitia, at the telephone: "Archie says that we want advice and not abuse, Aunt Julia, and I must say that I agree with him. Amusing? I don't think so, at all. I call it tragic. Forget it, and hustle for another cook? If I only thought, Aunt Julia, that the case was as simple as that I should feel extremely relieved. Thank you. No, don't come in—please don't. I am quite capable of hustling, and Archie is here. No. Really, Aunt Julia, I wish you wouldn't call him an ass. You must remember that he is my husband. Even if he is an ass—which I am not admitting—you have no right to tell me so."

"You seem to imply, Letitia," I interrupted, much hurt, "that although you don't admit I'm an ass, I really might be one."

Letitia did not hear my little protest, but continued: "Yes, I will. Did you say intelligence office? Yes, I hear. Is there one in New York? Oh, thank you, Aunt Julia. It sounds so easy, and even delightful. One goes there and just selects a cook from a

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whole gathering of them? Aunt Julia, you have saved our lives. You think we are quite justified in believing that Anna has merely left, and has not met with foul play. How *should* we know? After all, if she had told us, we shouldn't have detained her. We didn't want to detain her. Quite usual? I can't credit that, Aunt Julia. You must be a pessimist. No, don't come into town, dear. If we need you, we'll wire. Yes, otherwise all is well. No, there is no hitch. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver, her face wreathed with smiles, and placing her hands on my shoulders, tiptoed and kissed me.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Archie," she cried, "that this horrible possibility of crime has been dispersed by Aunt Julia. She says that it is quite the thing in New York for a cook to vanish instantly, almost as though she had been conjured away. It is the etiquette of cooks, Aunt Julia says. And the delightful uncertainty of their return, every time they go out for a stroll, makes life exciting."

"I can't see anything to be pleased about, Letitia," I said rumblingly, for after all Aunt Julia had treated me rather badly at the telephone. "I would almost as soon know that Anna had met foul play, as to realize that *we* have. We certainly have. We have

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been disgracefully treated by that Zulu. And you seem charmed. At any rate we should have thought better of her, if we knew that she couldn't come back, simply because she had been murdered."

"Oh, Archie, I'm shocked," declared Letitia in a pained voice. "Such bloodthirsty sentiments! Positively, dear, I feel as though a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I didn't tell you what I really feared. I thought that perhaps she was vexed with me for not letting her arrange the flowers yesterday, and that, brooding over this, she might have committed suicide. Yes, I thought of that, Archie, and of what a life of remorse would mean to both of us. That was my dread, and now Aunt Julia has removed it, and I feel so deeply grateful."

"Perhaps you are right, old girl," I assented, cheering up, "things might be worse. They are bad enough, though, for if Anna marches off at a moment's notice like that, then they will all probably do the same thing."

"But we shan't think that they have met with foul play," Letitia announced triumphantly. "We shall know that they haven't, and we shan't worry. That is what I like about it. Oh, Archie, I'm so glad. You can go down-town, now, and earn your daily bread. And I shall hie me immediately to—er—what

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did Aunt Julia call it?—an intelligence office and choose a brand-new cook, somebody nice—”

“To wear the cap with the olive-green ribbons?”

“That later, perhaps,” she replied, with a bright smile. “I shan’t insist upon it, quite at once, Archie. I never knew about these intelligence offices. What a splendid idea! Fancy being able to go to a sort of convention of cooks, select one that appeals to you, and bring her home. Isn’t it clever? Certainly New York is the town for novelty and inventiveness. London and Paris are not in it. How London would open its sleepy old eyes at the notion of an intelligence office! I suppose it has never even heard of such a thing.”

“I must be off, Letitia. I am dreadfully late, and—”

“Good-by, old boy. When you come back to-night, you’ll find everything more satisfactory. For we’ll have a cook, and a good one, and—the thought of Anna will be just a horrid nightmare and nothing more.”

CHAPTER VI

My prediction was fulfilled. Arthur Tamworth did not appear at the office. Instead, he telephoned from his house, that, owing to a slight indisposition, he would remain at home for the day. The clerks were mystified, as Mr. Tamworth had never been known to absent himself from his business. To me, of course, it was clear as a pikestaff and grimly I declined to discuss the matter with the bookkeeper. I had an odiously guilty feeling, and in the matter of "secrets" it seemed to me that I could give Lady Audley points. The day dragged horribly. I was weighted down by my dreary knowledge, and as I sat at my desk, the various courses of our distinctly coarse and brutal dinner passed before my mind in lugubrious procession. I felt as Mathias must have done in *The Bells* with the odious souvenir of the lime-kiln on his conscience. However, in exultant optimism, I argued that this little "set-back" already belonged to the past, and I resolved to keep Tamworth's pitiful plight from Letitia, unless he died, victim of my hospitality. By the time I reached our apart-

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ment I had driven all these tantalizing thoughts from my mind, and when Letitia met me with a smile of affectionate welcome the past had been pushed back to its proper place.

"Sh!" said Letitia mysteriously, with a finger on her lips, as we went to the drawing-room, "I've got her, Archie. She's in the kitchen preparing dinner, and—and—you'll never guess, dear, so I may as well tell you the news. She—she used to be with the Vanderbilts!"

My wife was all excitement. There was a flush on her face, and I had never seen her look prettier. She was dressed for dinner, in still another evening gown, all white. There were forget-me-nots in her hair, and at her bosom. Letitia spoke in a whisper, as though she were afraid that a mere voice would startle the latest acquisition. Her enthusiasm, however, was contagious, and as she followed me to my dressing-room, where I quickly exchanged my business clothes for discreet broadcloth, I began to share her gay anticipation.

"Yes," she continued eagerly, "I went to the intelligence office and subscribed. At first, Archie, I felt most mortified. A dozen servant girls sat there, like at a minstrel show. They seemed to be quite lacking in old-fashioned respect and were not a bit

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abashed in the presence of prospective mistresses. They talked and laughed, and I could have sworn that they were criticising *me*. I tried not to hear them, but I know—yes, Archie, I know—that one girl, with a face that I shall never forget, meant me, when she remarked to a friend, ‘She’s a fool and I’m not taking any, thanks. I hate a fool.’ Of course, I pretended not to notice, but—”

Letitia reddened and seemed to forget her present satisfaction in the thought of her recent humiliation. She went on: “Fortunately, I was not the only one who needed a cook. At least fifty ladies were there, looking strangely desperate. One of them spoke to me, most impertinently, I thought. She was a stout matron and she said to me, very rudely: ‘Is this your first time in hell?’ I didn’t answer her, and she smiled and passed on. I heard her tell the proprietress of the office that she had a bicycle with a coaster brake, that she was willing, if necessary, to place at the disposal of her cook, but that, personally, she would prefer a cook who played the piano. I also heard her say that she, herself, would do all the work for two hours each morning while cook practised.”

“Was it a lunatic asylum, or an intelligence office?” I asked, as I knotted my tie.

“Oh, it really was an intelligence office,” Letitia

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replied seriously. "I thought that I must have made a mistake at first, and arrived at a wrong address. It was all so odd. The ladies seemed to be cooks and the cooks seemed to be ladies. Really, Archie"—with a laugh—"it was quite like a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, without music. I heard one lady tell Mrs. Jones, the proprietress, that she was quite willing to allow her husband to take cook to the theater once a week, but she stipulated that cook should not ask to go to the Metropolitan Opera House on Wagner nights."

"Come, Letitia," I said impatiently, "I dare say you mean to be funny, but I do hope, dear, that you are not going to develop a sense of humor. You know my views on that subject."

"But, Archie, this is all true. It is, honest Injun. I am as much mystified as you are. I thought I was dreaming, or at the theater. I couldn't realize that it was genuine. Fortunately for me, Mrs. Jones attended to me immediately. Just after I had heard the conversation about the Metropolitan Opera House on Wagner nights, an old, rather melancholy looking person came in. Mrs. Jones jumped up and said: 'Here's the very thing for you, Mrs. Fairfax.' And before I knew it, I was on my way home with a cook

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who had been with the Vanderbilts. Her name, Archie, is Mrs. Potzenheimer. She's German."

"So I should judge," I murmured. "Potzenheimer! Good gracious, Letitia!"

"What does the name matter, you silly boy? That which we call a Potzenheimer, etcetera. Think of our luck, dear. On the way home, I remembered Aunt Julia's suggestion always to ask for references. I had quite forgotten all about it, stupid-like. Mrs. Potzenheimer looked very sad and weary, poor soul. She told me that Mrs. Vanderbilt would be delighted to give her a reference, but that at present she was in England, visiting the Duchess of Marlborough."

I'm not a snob, not a bit of one. I'm a democrat to the roots of my hair. Still, as this reflected glory shed itself upon me, I felt a strange sense of elation.

"Which of the Vanderbilts was it?" I asked.

"How provoking you are, Archie!" exclaimed Letitia impatiently. "Isn't any Vanderbilt good enough for us—to get a cook from? Suppose it were Alfred, or Reginald, or William K. Vanderbilt. What difference does it make? I was so overjoyed that I felt positively pleased to hear that Mrs. Vanderbilt was with the Duchess of Marlborough. If she had been here I should have deemed it my duty to call upon her

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for a reference, and—you know what these people are—it might have been a bad one. Absolutely, I'd sooner have a bad Vanderbilt cook, than a good ordinary, plain affair."

"There is something in what you say, old girl," I was bound to assent.

"If *you* think so, dear, I am quite satisfied," Letitia responded readily. "But there is one thing about Mrs. Potzenheimer—by-the-by, she suggests that we call her Nellie—that troubles me. She says she never wants to go out."

"And that troubles you!" I exclaimed, astonished. "I should think you would be rejoiced. We shall feel so much safer in the knowledge that Mrs. Potzen—Nellie—is always in the kitchen."

"But it is so sad, Archie," persisted Letitia. "When I asked her what night she would like to go out, she burst out crying. She said she had nowhere to go—that she was old, and that nobody cared for her. She wept for ten minutes, and I think—I'm not sure, Archie—that I joined her. Poor old soul! My first impulse was to ask her to come in and sit with us—"

"Letitia!"

"I said 'my first impulse,'" she went on firmly. "I never act on first impulses, and I did not do so this

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time. Just the same, I felt sorry for cook. Perhaps she will get chummy with the servants in other apartments. She seems so respectable and dresses neatly in black. A more striking contrast to Anna Carter could scarcely be imagined. She is extremely quiet, and sits down a good deal. Each time I have seen her she has been 'resting her bones' as she calls it. Isn't it pitiful, Archie, to think of such a woman 'being forced to earn her living, instead of passing her days in a little cottage with honeysuckle all over it—"

"But there are none in New York, dear."

"You needn't be so disgustingly literal, Archie," Letitia protested with a pout. "I say that it is a pity she can't pass her days in a little cottage with honeysuckle all over it, and with her grandchildren grouped around her knee."

"Is she so fearfully old?" I asked in alarm.

"One needn't be disgracefully antique to have grandchildren," my wife declared. "You are so old-fashioned, dear. You revel in pictures of white-haired, toothless, old creatures when you hear of grandmothers. If my grandmother were alive to-day she would be just fifty-three. She married at sixteen."

"They always do, nowadays," I retorted cynically.

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"Sixteen seems to be the age for women to marry at when they intend to become grandmothers."

"Hush!" cried Letitia, for at that moment Mrs. Potzenheimer came in to tell us that dinner was served. Most aged and infirm was Mrs. Potzenheimer, and I looked at her in amazement. She was slightly lame and her face was wizened and pinched. Her eyes filled with tears as she told us that dinner was ready. I had felt ravenously hungry, but the sight of the new domestic nipped my pangs. Not being wholly bad, a feeling of compassion took possession of me. A horrid idea that I should be waiting on cook, instead of cook waiting on me, almost overwhelmed me.

Our places were laid, but the table had no other decoration than a bottle of Worcestershire sauce on a little mat in the middle. Never have I seen a bottle of Worcestershire look so funereally lonely. Robinson Crusoe on his desert island was a crowd in comparison. We sat down, depressed and gloomy. I felt that like the dove on the mast—in the song—I must "mourn, and mourn, and mourn."

"I wonder if this table decoration is a duplicate of Mrs. Vanderbilt's," I murmured, as I unfolded my table-napkin.

"It *is* strange," Letitia agreed, in a whisper. "I

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can't understand why she has 'starred' the Worcester-shire sauce. It is really such an ugly thing, with the brick-red label and the crude stopper."

"Perhaps there are some tenement-house Vanderbilts," I suggested moodily.

"I told you, Archie," Letitia insisted, "that the Mrs. Vanderbilt who employed Nellie is at present visiting the Duchess of Marlborough at Blenheim Castle, so that settles it. She particularly said Blenheim Castle."

Mrs. Potzenheimer brought in a seething dish of mutton stew, that emitted a fragrant odor. She set it down with a heavy sigh. I noticed a tear trickling down her cheek, and so did Letitia, for I saw my wife's face grow serious. It was very good stew, indeed. If we could have called it a *ragoût*, we should have felt more at ease. It was a stew, however, and, with the best of intentions, it was impossible even to think of it as anything else.

"She is much older than you implied, Letitia," I said, as cook limped out of the room and we began dinner. "She really seems positively decrepit."

Letitia sat looking at her food rather wistfully. "It is the electric light, I think," she whispered—the constant whispering made me nervous—"I admit, Archie, that she looks twenty years older, lighted up.

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In the daytime I put her down as forty. But you know, dear, I engaged her in such a hurry that I couldn't be quite sure. It does seem cruel to allow such an old woman—”

“Well, dear,—I was growing cheerful in the material comfort of the moment,—“we don't force her to do it. She evidently wanted a position, or you wouldn't have found her at the intelligence office.”

“She was crying when she brought in the stew.” Letitia's lip quivered ominously.

“Why should she cry?” I asked with asperity—I carefully turned on the asperity in order to combat Letitia's weakness. “Why should she cry? She naturally expects to cook. It can't be a surprise to her. She must know that she isn't here just as an ornament, or—”

“You are so hard, Archie,” Letitia faltered. “You can sit there and enjoy a dinner cooked by a poor old soul. Of course, I'm glad you enjoy it. It is better so. But still—I can't touch it. She has unnerved me. She must be thinking of her loved ones.”

“You said she hadn't any.”

“I didn't!” cried Letitia indignantly. “I said nothing of the sort. I said she ought to be with her grandchildren, and so she ought. I dare say she has dozens of grandchildren. Germans always have. It

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is their custom. I suppose they don't want her—the wretches—as she has nowhere to go. And she seems so inoffensive and simple."

"Do try and eat, Letitia," I urged. "You make me feel so greedy. Don't be angry, dear, but don't you think it's a bit far-fetched? You engage a cook with your eyes open, and then you won't touch the food she prepares because she is old. She was just as old this morning."

"It isn't her age exactly," Letitia explained hesitantly, "but I can't bear to see a human being in tears. Who are we that we should distress a nice old woman so poignantly? What right have we to do it?"

I did not answer, for I thought that Letitia was a trifle exaggerated. However, she made a brave effort to dine, and being young and healthy, I was glad to notice that the succulent stew overcame her sentimental regrets. I fancy that she felt a little better after she had partaken of nourishment. Still, it was with great reluctance that she rang the bell, and as Mrs. Potzenheimer ambled in, Letitia was distinctly nervous. We tried to talk lightly during the removal of the dishes, but it was impossible. Mrs. Potzenheimer's eyes were suffused and she sighed stertorously. It was a long time before she emerged from

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the kitchen with a rice pudding. I observed that one of her thumbs was almost hidden in the pudding and this rather encouraged me, for I thought that it would vex Letitia and stem the tide of her ill-advised sympathy. Letitia, however, was studying Mrs. Potzenheimer's face and not her thumb. It is my opinion that cook's entire hand could have been submerged 'neath the rice and Letitia would never have noticed it. So I called her attention to my unappetizing discovery.

"If she did that in Mrs. Vanderbilt's house," I said sternly, "no wonder that lady has fled to the Duchess of Marlborough, and to rice puddings *minus* thumbs."

"I fail to see that there is anything particularly criminal in a thumb," Letitia retorted. "It is not the thumb of an outsider. She made the pudding herself with her own hands and thumbs. Don't be so exasperating, Archie. Oh, yes, I know that it isn't nice, and that it's very bad form. But I shan't tell her about it. I'm not going to add to her burden. Evidently, she feels her position—"

"And our rice pudding—"

"—very acutely. She seems to me like a woman who has known better days. Probably the Vanderbilts treat their inferiors very badly. There is nothing like the insolence and the superciliousness of peo-

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ple of that class. It shall be my endeavor to show her the difference. I shall go out of my way to be sweet and soothing to her. She feels strange, of course. You can go into the drawing-room and smoke there to-night. I shall go and see that Nellie is comfortable."

It was no use arguing. I went to the drawing-room, discontentedly enough, and broke the rules of the house by smoking there. It was with Letitia's permission, to be sure, but I felt uneasy. It was the thin end of the wedge, and I hated to think of the whole wedge. My nerves were on edge and I could settle to nothing. I kept fancying I heard Mrs. Potzenheimer sobbing, and Letitia soothing her, with a "There now!" Even the unsatisfied yearning sensation that had succeeded Anna Carter's delicatessen dinner was better than this. We seemed to have engaged trouble, at big wages, and the thought was maddening. If Letitia Potzenheimered every night after dinner, what would become of me, I selfishly wondered. Of course, I had my *Lives of Great Men*, but just at present mere greatness "riled" me. The very thought of greatness evaporated in reflections upon Mrs. Potzenheimer.

The clock struck nine, and still I sat smoking in solitary silence. I picked up Letitia's Cicero, open

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at *De Senectute*, and it seemed ominous. "Neither gray hairs nor wrinkles," I read, "can suddenly catch respect; but the former part of life, honorably spent, reaps the fruit of authority at the close. For these very observances, which seem light and common—"

I shut the book with a bang. In sudden irritation I wondered how Letitia could read such rubbish. Yes, rubbish, I asserted in mental indignation. Thank goodness that my wife didn't hear me, and that nobody heard me. My mood was surely no excuse for an insult hurled at the sacred memory of Cicero, amiably addressing Titus Pomponius Atticus. How could Letitia toboggan from Cicero to Mrs. Potzenheimer?

It was just ten o'clock when my wife joined me. She looked very tired and I saw that she had been weeping. This touched me, and the hasty words that my lips had formed remained unsaid.

"She is asleep," said Letitia gently. "She literally cried herself to sleep, Archie. I insisted that she should go to bed and let me take her in a little dinner. She managed to eat some stew and some rice pudding. Her appetite was really good. In fact"—with a smile—"she ate more than both of us together. But I fancy she did it to please me. She saw that I was genuinely distressed."

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"You shouldn't have let her see it, Letitia," I protested.

"How could I help it?"—reproachfully. "She told me a good deal about herself. She has no grandchildren. Don't interrupt, Archie. She has no grandchildren for the very good reason that she had no children. She was married many years, but never had —anything! Isn't it odd, dear, for a German? She always had to earn her own living. She was a nurse girl at seven. How sad to think of it!"

"What did she say about the Vanderbilts?" I repeat that I am not a snob, but one can't help being curious.

"She doesn't like to talk about them, Archie. I don't know why. I imagine that they must be very hard to get along with. But she did say that the Duchess of Marlborough was crazy to take her to England. However, she wouldn't go; she was too old, she said, and then she wept bitterly. She asked me a lot of questions about the people in the house—which, of course, I couldn't answer. And although she has only been here a few hours, and has been crying most of the time, she seems to have struck up an acquaintance with Mrs. Archer's cook below. While I was in the kitchen, Mrs. Archer's cook called up the dumb-waiter. I heard her say: 'What cheer?'

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and Mrs. Potzenheimer replied, in very low tones: 'Rotten.' I suppose she meant that she felt ill."

"What a horrid expression!" I exclaimed.

"Nellie seemed rather perturbed when she noticed that I had heard her," Letitia went on, "and explained that she had met Mrs. Archer's cook at the intelligence office. She didn't allude to the expression she used. When she was in bed she called for a little whisky, and I gave her some."

"Letitia, you shouldn't—"

"She hated it, Archie," said Letitia, with a wry face. "She told me that it positively went against her, but that she took it for her heart. She has a weak heart, dear. She drank half a tumblerful, as she says it always puts her on her feet again after one of these little attacks."

"I don't like it, Letitia," I remarked suspiciously. "I don't like it at all."

Letitia smiled and kissed me. "Of course you don't, you silly old boy," she said lightly, "you've been left alone, and I'm glad you don't like it. I should be vexed if you did. Did-ems leave-ems all alone-ems? But one must do a little good in the world, Archie. Suppose you were ill in a strange place, wouldn't you be grateful to anybody who tried to make you com-

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fortable? Put yourself in Mrs. Potzenheimer's place."

"You are a foolish girl, Letitia," I declared, mollified in spite of myself. "But if we are going to start a Home for the Aged—"

"Stop it, Archie. Now, stop it. You mustn't be harsh and unreasonable. What happened to-night will probably never happen again. Would you like me if I were hard-hearted, and cold-blooded? Think of Nellie as though she were your own grandmother."

"Why should I, Letitia?" I asked impatiently, wound up again. "I've been trying to think of her as my cook. That is all I bargained to do. It is not likely that I should engage my own grandmother—"

"Oh, you are so cross—so cross!" sighed Letitia; "I have never seen you so disagreeable. After all, Archie, you are a great big baby. You are vexed because I left you alone for a few moments."

"An hour and a half!"

"An hour and a half? Was it really so long? It couldn't have been. Well, perhaps it was. Anyway, I'm glad you missed me. It is a consolation. I missed you, dear. It wasn't at all amusing waiting on a lachrymose old woman, plying her with drink and tucking her up in bed. It was really most objection-

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able, and I'm extremely lacking as a ministering angel. I can't minister for a cent. But I can try, can't I? And—let's be as quiet as we can, Archie, and not disturb the poor thing."

CHAPTER VII

Dismal, dreary, depressing, are adjectives that scarcely qualify the week that ensued. They do not express the subtle, underlying something that made my home almost unendurable. There was a sense of impending crisis that was horrible. Mrs. Potzenheimer's ailments became more numerous, varied, and pungent. My whisky bills were absolutely menacing. Letitia developed quite a *connoisseur's* estimate of spirituous liquors, and the various brands of rye and Scotch, as well as of Old Tom and Holland in the gin list, seemed to displace her student's appreciation of Cicero and Ovid as light literature.

On three occasions we dined at a restaurant, while Mrs. Potzenheimer went to bed. We generally spoke in whispers, and once, when I whistled *Hiawatha*, Letitia nearly grew hysterical. This was not due to the fact that *Hiawatha* happened to be extremely hackneyed, but to the circumstance that Nellie was trying to take a nap. How I hated it all! Letitia was pale and looked worn, for she never went out. Mrs. Potzenheimer was too infirm to open the door

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when the bell rang and Letitia insisted upon doing it herself. The dinners of which we partook at home were invariably composed of stew and rice pudding. They palled. Nellie, when remonstrated with (and not by Letitia), explained that the Duchess of Marlborough had been so partial to stew that she had practically lived upon it, and what was good enough for Her Grace of Marlborough was good enough, she thought—etcetera. At the end of the week the mere thought of stew sickened me. It was a subject that I detested to mention and an object that I loathed to see before me. Mrs. Potzenheimer wept just as frequently. I believe she wept tears of whisky and gin. I could have sworn, once or twice, that I saw Old Tom trickling down her cheeks.

Then came the climax. It had been a dark day. The birds were *not* twittering in the sunshine; the air was *not* laden with the balmy perfume of a thousand flowers. I had felt a sense of oppression all day while at the office. I had brooded to such an extent that Arthur Tamworth had begged me to take a holiday. Tamworth, by-the-by, had recovered, I am thankful to say, and he never alluded to our little dinner. At first he had seemed gently reproachful but this wore off. He was now quite able to be up and doing.

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The climax, above mentioned, bore down upon me when I reached my apartment. There was no Letitia to greet me. The dense silence could almost be felt, and through it I groped my way to the drawing-room. My wife was there, in an arm-chair, propped up by cushions, and asleep. Although it was the hour when, according to our code, it was barbaric to be found in any but evening garb, Letitia wore a Mother Hubbard wrapper of red flannelette. There were traces of tears on her face; her eyelashes were wet; it was quite evident that she had just fallen asleep after some exhausting experience. Her tousled and generally dilapidated appearance was extraordinary.

As I bent over her, she moved uneasily, and I heard her murmur: "It's Old Tom, Nellie. It's Old Tom."

Of course, I understood. Not being like the fools in the foolish plays of to-day, I was quite aware that Old Tom was not a rival, but merely a gin. Consequently there was no dramatic situation in my mind as I mopped my perspiring brow. I was simply aghast at the inexplicable position of my domestic evening.

"It isn't Old Tom, dear," I said gently, kissing her awake, "it's old Archie."

She looked at me in perplexity for a moment or two before she disturbed the silence. I thought it best to

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ask no questions, but to let the evil tidings come all by themselves.

"The worst has happened, Archie," she said slowly, and she even forgot to kiss me. "I have had the most fearful afternoon. I don't know how I've lived through it, and—and—Nellie's gone!"

"Thank Heaven!" I exclaimed fervently. "If that is all, Letitia, if there is nothing more than that to account for red flannelette at six o'clock, I am immensely thankful."

She glanced at her undignified Mother Hubbard, but did not smile. "I felt too worn out to dress," she said. "The mere idea of white silk seemed farcical. Archie, the situation is absolutely red flannelette, and—abominable. I feel I've aged. I must have gone white—like the prisoner of Chillon. Oh, I feel a hundred-and-ninety in the shade."

"Calm yourself, dear," I suggested soothingly. "Perhaps if you tell me all about it, you will feel better. Remember I know nothing."

"Poor Archie!" sighed Letitia; "it is a shame to worry you, but it can't be helped. Let me see how it began. Ah, yes. After luncheon, dear—I had some cold stew and a glass of cold water—Mrs. Potzenheimer complained again of her heart and I was naturally compassionate. I gave her some gin—Holland,

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I think it was, as the other was all gone. She was most insulting, and insisted upon having Old Tom. When I told her that she had finished it last night, she suggested that I run to the corner and buy some more. For a moment, Archie—”

“No, Letitia, no,” I cried in horror, “don’t tell me—I decline to listen.”

“I said ‘for a moment,’ Archie,” Letitia went on, “and if you interrupt, I’ll say no more. For one moment, I confess, I did think that I ought to humor an invalid. Then I remembered my dignity, and I told her firmly that it was Holland or nothing. I shall never forget it—never. She rose and in a most matter-of-fact voice announced that her week of trial was up, and that she had had enough of us, that she would thank me for her wages, and that she was going. At first I thought she was joking.”

“You don’t mean—”

“She seemed perfectly well,” Letitia continued. “All her aches and pains had disappeared as if by magic. She said that our house was too dull for her and that she had been used to life and excitement. She couldn’t live with people who didn’t seem to entertain and who never dined out. I was so amazed that I could scarcely speak, but I murmured something about her health and she burst out laughing.

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She said that such a dingy couple as we were would make any woman ill. Such ingratitude, such a fiendish reward for my kindness, I could never have contemplated. At first I refused to give her any wages, and she threatened some Protective Women's Association on me, and told me that I hadn't a chance against such an old woman as she was. So I handed out the money."

"Very wrongly, Letitia," I asserted.

"And if she had asked for double the amount, I should have handed that out, too," Letitia continued, not heeding my interruption. "She made a great point of the legal aspect of the case. I seemed to see a crowded court-room, and you, Archie, being led in as the prisoner. And—and—I almost heard a verdict of guilty. I tell you, dear, I was delighted to escape it all by means of a five-dollar bill. It seemed a ridiculously cheap way out of it. But that isn't all. It isn't nearly all. The worst is yet to come."

"No more Vanderbilt servants for me," I muttered bitterly. "Hang the Vanderbilts and their beastly system of housekeeping!"

"Archie," said Letitia mysteriously, "I don't believe that Mrs. Potzenheimer ever saw a Vanderbilt. I was furious with her, and told her that I should

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write at once to the Duchess of Marlborough and inform her of the behavior of her favorite cook. I thought that she might be contemplating returning to the service of the Vanderbilts. Would you believe it, Archie? She simply grinned in my face and mimicked me. I was so anxious for her to leave the house that I could scarcely wait. I don't think that she was more than five minutes getting ready, but it seemed like an eternity. After she had gone I went to my room to dress—don't think, dear, that the red flannelette was premeditated—and it was then I discovered that my diamond ring—the hoop you gave me, Archie—that I had laid on my bureau had vanished."

"I'll go at once and get a detective," I exclaimed ferociously.

"Hush," she said in a tired voice. "Six silver spoons, monogrammed A. L. F., that Aunt Julia gave me, your gold whisky flask, and my tortoise-shell comb, with the pearls and turquoises are all missing. She was in a great hurry to go, and I was in a greater hurry to see her go—"

"And she was such a simple, inoffensive old woman," I muttered savagely, "and you hated to see her work! And you thought she should be with her

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grandchildren! And the cottage with honeysuckle all over it! And nowhere to go! And a weak heart! And that infernal mutton stew—”

I paused in incoherent anger, only to experience a painful remorse, as Letitia began to sob.

“That is so like a man!” she cried, turning from me as I uttered fervent apologies and pleas for pardon. “You are a man, after all, Archie, and I never looked upon you as one. I thought you were something better—something nobler. I was mistaken. I find—I find that I have—have married—have married a man after all.”

I was greatly alarmed. This was the first sign of the demon of disenchantment. Although I don’t know why I was so bitterly chagrined at Letitia’s discovery that I was a man—I nevertheless was. For the moment it seemed disgusting to be a man. I could have found it in my heart to wish that I were a monkey.

“Forgive me, Letitia, forgive me,” I urged, severely distressed; “I was wrong. I hope you’ll pardon me. Don’t—don’t, dear—call me a man, again, in that tone. I can’t stand it. Oh, curse this Potzenheimer woman who has brought us to this!”

“There—there!” exclaimed Letitia, brushing away her tears and kissing me. “You didn’t mean it, I

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know, but after what I've gone through this afternoon, I can't endure very much more. And you appeared to be reproaching me, as though I were upholding that villainous hypocrite of a woman, who seemed—”

She paused, as though expecting me to add “so simple and inoffensive.” But this time, I had learned my lesson, and I was so thankful for Letitia's forgiveness that I had nothing further to say. And, after all, I had been wrong to taunt her.

“You can imagine how I felt,” Letitia went on presently, “when I discovered the loss of the valuables. I didn't mind the whisky flask, or the comb, or the spoons, but the ring you gave me, Archie—it almost broke my heart to lose it. Just as I had made up my mind to send for you, there was a peal at the bell, and in stalked a woman, who said she was Mrs. Archer, living in the apartment below us.”

“How horribly informal!” I exclaimed. “How do we know anything about Mrs. Archer?”

“It wasn't an occasion for etiquette, Archie. Mrs. Archer was in a desperate state. It seems that her cook spent most of her time with Mrs. Potzenheimer, when we were dining out at restaurants on account of Mrs. Potzenheimer's health. The irony of it all! Her cook was another antiquity, with an aristocratic

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record. She had come to Mrs. Archer, without references, but had declared she had lived with the Ogden Goelets."

"Go on, Letitia," I said, in a Sherlock Holmes voice.

And Mrs. Ogden Goelet was in Europe, visiting the Duchess of Roxburgh. *And* the Duchess of Roxburgh had been very much attached to her, and had been crazy to take her to London. *And* she was too old to go, and wanted to 'rest her bones' in New York. *And* she was always ailing, and nothing seemed to do her any good but gin and whisky."

"I guessed it, Letitia," I cried triumphantly; "I guessed it."

"She behaved precisely like Mrs. Potzenheimer. She came from the same intelligence office. She left, at a moment's notice."

"Taking with her a diamond ring, six silver spoons, a gold whisky flask, and a comb with pearls and turquoises," I went on glibly, still in those staccato Sherlock Holmes tones.

"Or valuables to that effect," corrected Letitia.

"Certainly," I assented judicially, "certainly. It is clear, Letitia, that these women must have been in league, and that a carefully planned robbery has been effected."

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"If you had made that discovery yesterday, Archie, before it had been effected, you might have done some good. Of course, it is quite clear to-day. A child could see that," she added impatiently. "I wish you wouldn't interrupt me with such wonderful deductions, dear. I dare say they *are* clever, but—"

Letitia's irritable tone hurt me. The pain of these incidents had been temporarily deadened by my Sherlock Holmes demeanor. Still, I was bound to confess that, as Letitia pointed out, the case did seem simple.

"Mrs. Archer seemed furious with *me*," Letitia said querulously. "The more we discovered that our troubles coincided, the angrier she grew. At one time"—and here Letitia flushed—"she seemed to be positively suspicious. She had noticed the constant communication between the two cooks by means of the dumb-waiter."

"The dumb-waiter seems to be a sort of hyphen, connecting devils," I interpolated epigrammatically.

"Don't be witty, Archie. Don't even try to be witty, please. As I think of Mrs. Archer's attitude, when she first entered, I feel humiliated. She admitted that she thought Rosie was here. Rosie was the cook. And it was not until I told her of Nellie's departure, and the loss I had sustained, that her manner changed. When I mentioned the fact that I had

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missed a diamond ring, six silver spoons, a gold whisky flask, and a comb with pearls and turquoises, she really heaved a sigh of relief. She said, 'Oh, I'm so glad, Mrs. Fairfax—' and then she checked herself, and added that she was glad the case was not complicated."

"I'll see her husband, and demand a written apology," I declared indignantly.

"You are always too late, dear," said Letitia quietly. "Mrs. Archer apologized profusely. She told me that her husband had always been suspicious of people who live in apartments—since Dr. Parkhurst had bungled up New York. She was very nice. She said she could see at once that we were quite respectable."

"How insulting!" I cried.

"Insulting!" echoed Letitia. "If she had said she could see that we were *not* quite respectable, then it would have been insulting. Perhaps I am describing the scene badly. At any rate, though it may sound insulting to you, Archie, it didn't to me. She didn't say it in precisely the terms I have used. Mrs. Archer is a very pleasant person. We grew quite chummy. We added up our losses. Rosie had taken three hundred and thirty-seven dollars' worth, and Nellie had gone off with at least seven hundred and fifty dollars'

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worth. She admitted that I was twice as aggrieved as she was. And I must say, Archie, I couldn't help feeling pleased that I had the best of her."

"The best of her, Letitia? You mean the worst of her."

"I don't," she insisted. "When a woman confronts you angrily and announces indignantly that she is a victim, it is a satisfaction to turn upon her, with the irrefutable evidence that she is not as much of a victim as you are. I felt a triumphant sense of 'There now!' Just the same, now that she has gone, I could cry all over again as I think of my loss. I put a brave face on the matter, for the sake of appearances. We had tea together, but when she had left, the trouble all came back to me and I think, Archie, that I must have wept myself to sleep."

"I suppose I had better report the case," I suggested.

"It will be waste of time," said Letitia. "Mrs. Archer told me so. Now that Rosie and Nellie have gone, she remembers reading of two crooks who have been robbing apartment houses lately. Like you, dear, she is a bit late."

"I don't know why you speak so slightly of your husband, Letitia," I interposed haughtily.

"I don't mean to slight you at all, Archie. But

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you see through a case when it is all over, and Mrs. Archer remembers important information when it is no longer important. That is all, dear. Rosie and Nellie have probably left the city, and the state, taking care to cover their tracks."

"Still for the sake of other possible victims—"

"Never mind them, Archie," said Letitia promptly, "they must take care of themselves as we have had to do. Anyway, now that you are here, and that I have eased myself by telling you all, I feel better. And it is such a relief not to have a patient with a weak heart on one's hands. Positively, dear, I am relieved. It is as though I have shifted a burden. It is almost worth seven hundred and fifty dollars to feel comfortable. You really didn't need the gold whisky flask, and I can get along without the tortoise-shell comb. The diamond ring is a blow, but I intend to forget it. I'll just put on my things and you shall take me out to dinner, and then we'll go to the theater and see something jolly, with rattle in it."

"Sothern's playing *Hamlet*," I insinuated, "and Shakespeare always cheers you."

"But he wouldn't to-night, Archie. Who shall minister to a mind be-cooked? One must be mentally serene to appreciate *Hamlet*. I want to forget Mrs. Potzenheimer, and although I adore classics, they

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don't exhilarate on occasions like these. Would you think me quite dreadful and illiterate, if, instead of *Hamlet*, I suggest—”

“Mrs. Fiske in *Hedda Gabler?*”

“No, dear, just—er—Weber and Fields'. Do you mind?”

“Oh, Letitia,” I said in a shocked voice, though I could scarcely repress a smile of joy, “I am amazed. I should never have thought it of you. Still, if you insist,—well, let us go to Weber and Fields'. We can leave when we are disgusted.”

“I shall stay till the end,” announced Letitia firmly, “and I hope it lasts until midnight. That is the way I feel to-night.”

CHAPTER VIII

While a well-selected little restaurant dinner undoubtedly loosens the trammels of a too obdurate and persistent domesticity, the restaurant breakfast can scarcely be said to be conducive to an overweening amiability. Those who have tried it will not be inclined to dispute the matter. It is in the early morn that the term restaurant seems singularly inappropriate. The luminous, glittering, chattering resort where, at night, one may throw off one's care and temporarily forget one's home and mother, is, in the forenoon, but—an eating house. One is there, in vulgar materialism—to eat! The boiled-egg moment, that the mere ethics of good taste assign to privacy—with the morning ablutions and the care of the teeth—is a tragedy when translated into publicity. Conviviality, at the boiled-egg moment, is an impossibility. Ordinary courtesy is abstruse and difficult. Silence, the morning papers, the birth of one's daily attitude—the natural cravings of the hour—give way to the gloomy desolation of the public resort. Cheek-by-jowl with other unfortunates, in whom it is hope-

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less to discover an interest—for altruism is not born until noon, and mere selfishness monopolizes the morning hours—the meal is a detestable torture, worthy of a place in the catalogue of mediæval horrors.

Yet Letitia and I came to it. We came to it next morning. There were no warm slippers for me; there was no loose dressing-gown for Letitia. We dressed; we put on our bonnets and shawls; we sallied forth to boiled egg. We were rather sullen about our sallying, and being devoid of a sense of humor, we saw nothing amusing in the empty glory of our prettily furnished apartment. I am told that the situation would have been saved, for the humorously born, by this mere idea. Yet I am still thankful for my mental inability to rout tragedy by comedy.

Letitia looked at me unaffectionately; I was able to regard Letitia without rapture. The maintenance of the honeymoon mood is generally strenuous—which is not meant for cynicism—but the honeymoon in its most effulgent radiance must pale, as Lubin and Dulcinea seek their boiled egg abroad. Alas!

“I dare not try it, Letitia,” I said, shivering, as a morning waiter, in evening dress, set the terrible thing before me. “I have a horrible presentiment that it is bad. I don’t know why, but I can’t shake off the idea. Eggs are such a lottery.”

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"I wish you wouldn't set me against my food," she retorted peevishly, slicing the top from the offensive egg and peering timidly into it. Then with a smile: "Perhaps it's like the curate's egg."

"Don't, Letitia!" I cried indignantly, "I loathe that alleged joke. It is so silly and so played out. Besides, it was never meant for morning use. There are some things that it is criminal to jest about—eggs, and *Parsifal*, and cooks, and the Passion play," I added desperately.

I was determined that I would not taste my egg until I saw how Letitia took to hers. They were probably of the same brand. It was perhaps cowardly of me to let a frail little woman explore the mysteries of an unguessed egg, but I was in a thoroughly perverse mood. I watched her stolidly as she dipped in her spoon, stirred up the contents, and transferred a portion of them to her mouth. Nothing happened. She did not change color and I realized that all was well. For in the case of the restaurant egg: *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*

The tea tasted like boiled hay. It was called English breakfast tea, probably because the English would never think of drinking it, and if they did, they would never drink it at breakfast time. But it was hot and wet—two qualities that are sufficient for

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those who have not mastered the sublime art of tea-drinking. Letitia scarcely touched her breakfast. She immersed herself in the advertising columns of the morning newspaper, and was quite hidden behind the sheet. I was in that odious humor when, to be looked at as I ate, was unendurable—something simply not to be borne with equanimity. I was glad that Letitia couldn't see me, for while she wasn't looking I did very nicely, and ate my team of boiled eggs with relish! If Letitia had been looking at me, I should have left them both. One can not always account for the morning mood. And yet I have never been called a "crank."

"Archie," she said suddenly (and I quickly hid the egg-shells so that she should not remark upon my strangely-found appetite), "I think I've got it at last. It really looks as though there were a way out of our difficulties. But I do wish, dear boy, that you would try to eat."

She glanced at my plate. She saw the egg-shells. The rolls, butter, tea, had all disappeared. I felt a flush mount to my brow. Had I been detected in the commission of a crime, I could not have looked more uncomfortable.

"Oh, I see you have managed to do very well," she said in a pleased voice, without a vestige of sarcasm.

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"In fact"—with a smile—"if you do as well as that, without an appetite, I am quite unable to imagine what you would do with one. You are a healthy boy—healthy but silly."

"Well, Letitia," I murmured abjectly, "you were reading, and paying no attention to me—I might have been down at the Battery for all you cared—so I had to do something in self-defense."

"Don't apologize," said Letitia, and this time there was an intonation of ill-timed jocularity in her voice. "I am glad you were hungry, and I wish that I had been. I've eaten nothing, and you don't even notice it. You don't urge me to eat. It doesn't matter."

"Letitia!" I cried reproachfully. "Please—please—"

She laughed.

"I'm teasing you, Archie, and I didn't mean to do so. You are such a lovely subject for persecution that I can't resist the temptation. But—bother our appetites. I have forgotten the present and am looking into the future. Here is a little advertisement that will, I think, put an end to our anguish. Listen—"

She took a pencil and marked round the following, which she then proceeded to read aloud: "Irish widow lady, with one child, wants position as cook, in small

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refined family, of Christian principles. Good home preferred to big wages. Call 33 Sixth Avenue. Mrs. McCaffrey. Up one flight."

"Archie," said Letitia solemnly, laying down the paper, "I feel intuitively that Mrs. McCaffrey is our fate. I read fifty advertisements while you were trying—I mean while you were eating" (I winced), "and I felt a warm, rushy sensation when I came to the name of Mrs. McCaffrey. I believe it was telepathy, from 33 Sixth Avenue."

"Let me look at the advertisement." I took the paper, and read the portentous lines that Letitia had almost intoned. Then I re-read it.

"I suppose that she means to bring the child with her," I suggested ruefully. "That is the catch, Letitia. We do want a cook, but we don't want a child—at least hers."

"But, Archie, dear," said Letitia seriously, "we have none of our own."

"How could we have?" I cried, amazed and indignant.

"We won't argue that point," declared my wife, quite unruffled. "The fact is, Archie, that we haven't any children, whatever you may say, and however much you may argue. Under the circumstances, I don't object to a cook with a child. In fact, I quite

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like the idea. She will be very much steadier and less frivolous, and—Archie, I love children. I like their prattle, and their cunning little ways, and—”

“But,” I interrupted, catching at a straw with the zest of a drowning man, “you notice that she wants to go into the service of a family with Christian principles. Now, I don’t propose to saddle myself with Christian principles for the sake of my cook. I positively decline. What difference on earth it can possibly make to a cook whether she broil a steak for Buddhists, or Mohammedans, or Christian Scientists, or Swedenborgians—or even, for the Salvation Army, I can’t imagine. Religion in the kitchen is just a bit far-fetched. I consider that advertisement most insulting, Letitia.”

“Archie, really, you—”

“And I suppose,” I went on, wound up, “that we should have to sing hymns with her every night and perhaps go to church with her on Sunday. I won’t lend myself to such new-fangled notions. Cook is a question of dinner and not of religious belief. Besides, how could she know what our principles were? We might be atheists, and still inform her that we had Christian principles! I dare say that if we objected to her cooking, she would say we were not Christians, and if we protested at her going out more

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than eight times a week, she would declare that we were heathens. The child is bad enough, but the Christian principles are worse. I'm sorry, Letitia, but this advertisement is really a mass of palpable loopholes."

Tears came to Letitia's eyes. They seemed to be frequently in abeyance there nowadays, and they grieved me.

"For a couple who a few weeks ago knew nothing about the servant question, and indignantly scouted the idea that there was such a thing, we are getting on well," she said in a low voice. "You are growing awfully suspicious, Archie. The iron seems to have entered your soul. Because Anna Carter and Mrs. Potzenheimer were failures—quick failures I grant—you are now inclined to put every cook in the same boat. Oh, Archie, I'm ashamed of you. If you are always looking for evil motives you will find them, sure enough."

She paused, and the tears welled up again. The sight was so painful to me that—in sheer dread of its continuance—I succumbed. That is to say, I had no further adverse comments to make and the field was Letitia's! Undoubtedly, she knew it.

"You see, dear," she said in mollified tones, "you don't understand the probable position of poor Mrs.

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McCaffrey. Imagine her alone in the world with a child. She is poor. She must earn a living for the two of them. All she knows how to do is to cook. She places herself in the market as a cook. But there is the child! She can not smother it, and she must take it with her. She is therefore anxious that the place to which she takes it shall be respectable and—religious. I don't suppose that she is too fearfully particular. But naturally, she would not like to see the dear little thing in the house of a man who drank and swore, and of a woman who—well, of a woman who behaved in the femininely equivalent. So, just to protect herself, she says Christian principles. I admire her for it, Archie."

Silence on my part. Letitia's triumphant logic was of course unanswerable. I made no attempt to answer it, and Letitia was "riled."

"Do say something, dear," she urged.

"I don't want to vex you, Letitia," I said, "and that is why I am silent. But you surely must know that men with Christian principles do swear and do drink. Our old servant at Oxford had thoroughly Christian principles, but he used to beat his wife regularly every night. The Christian principles were there, but they were not sufficient."

Letitia knew that she had won the day and was in-

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stantly her own delightful, charming self. "You are splitting straws," she said, "you baby! I have a great mind to tell Mrs. McCaffrey exactly what you said—and don't believe! It would serve you right if I went to 33 Sixth Avenue and said, 'You'll like our home, Mrs. McCaffrey. My husband has Christian principles. He drinks like a fish, swears like a trooper, and beats his wife like a British workingman. But he is *such* a Christian!' Archie, I believe you're jealous, and that's the trouble with you. You think that if there is a child your nose will be out of joint. Such a foolish husband!"

And Letitia rose in her seat and kissed me over the table, although there were two waiters in dangerous proximity, and an enormous married couple, who seemed scandalized, at the very next table. It really did look most unseemly at such an ungodly hour of the morning!

"Now confess," she said tauntingly, "confess that you are pleased. Confess it at once, sir, or—or I shall kiss you again, and this time much louder."

I tried to be stern, and to recall the various grades of vexation that I had known since the boiled eggs were brought in. But my irritation had vanished. My wife, witch-like, had dissipated the mists that had obscured my good nature. After all, if she were

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pleased, why need I worry? The affairs of our household were assuredly hers—although, up to the present, I had suffered from their most uncomfortable reflection. I felt better. Perhaps the much-despised breakfast was, in spite of all, partly responsible for the mental metamorphosis.

"She certainly will have a good home," said Letitia, pursuing her thoughts aloud, "and it is really nice to meet a woman who wants one. It shows a refined mood. What did Anna Carter care for a good home, except to go away from it every night? And Mrs. Potzenheimer? You are very domesticated for a man, Archie—whatever you may be, you are that—and I feel sure that Mrs. McCaffrey will take to you at once. And, Archie—I shall teach the child to call you uncle, and me auntie. It will be so dear and sweet."

"What an absurd girl you are, Letitia," I exclaimed, amused in spite of myself at her ingenuous remarks. "You remind me of Dora, the child-wife, in *David Copperfield*."

"I call that most unkind," she declared indignantly. "I always hated that character. Dora was such a fool that I was glad when she died. Please don't compare me to her again, Archie. I don't think I

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am a fool. Of course, I select a rosy outlook. I hope for the best, and I believe that most things are meant to turn out well. But I think I am most practical, and sensible, and staid, and sophisticated, and—old before my years."

I settled my account with the persistently smiling waiter, who appeared to regard us as jokes, and we left the restaurant. Letitia determined to ride down town with me and to set out at once in quest of the Irish McCaffrey. I had some qualms about permitting her to meander around the lower extremities of Sixth Avenue in the seclusion of the one-flight-up resorts. But she overruled my objections in her usual vivid manner.

"When you come home this evening," she said gaily, as we sat in the elevated train, and were whizzed south, "you'll find a nice little wife, a nice little cook, and a nice little child."

"To say nothing of a nice little dinner," I added materially. "At any rate, Letitia, I do hope you'll insist that the Christian principles are not cooked with the dinner. If there is anything on earth that I detest, it is Christian food. Porridge and griddle cakes for breakfast, cold rubbish for luncheon, and overdone chops, followed by indigestible, chunky pie

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—that is my conception of Christian food. I can't help thinking that much of the immorality in the world is simply due to Christian food."

"Stop it!" cried Letitia, laying a gloved finger on my lips. "You think you are getting clever. You are trying to imitate Grundy, Pinero, and Barrie, and I assure you that it is all lost on me. I want a cook, and not an epigram."

"As I said," I continued forcefully and rather loudly, "much of the immorality of the world is simply due to Christian food. Christian food is easy and generally—boiled. The mistaken idea that sound morals are the result of bad digestion is responsible for the inartistic plight of England and America."

"Hush, Archie!" exclaimed Letitia, looking around her nervously. "You talk as though you were haranguing a mob. And just the sort of nonsense that a mob loves, too. As for the plight of England and America—you are forgetting France. And look where French gluttony has led the nation! As for lack of morality—"

"Bah!" I remarked perversely, "France's lack of morality is a phrase used for advertising purposes, my girl. There is a bigger lack of it in London and New York, but you don't hear so much about it, because it is ugly—like English plum pudding and

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American baked beans. No people can be really wicked who have invented the Duval restaurants. Compare the light-hearted, cheerful, exhilarating, comfortably-stomached Parisians, sitting outside their *cafés* and sipping their *eaux sucrées*, with the greedy English, absorbing stodgy buns and dingy lemonade, and with the criminal Americans, assimilating poisonous ice-creams, and destroying their mucous membranes with odious candies."

"At the next station I get out and walk," declared Letitia furiously. "I'll leave you, Archie. Your breakfast has gone to your head. What is the matter with you? Really, I begin to think that our domestic troubles have unseated your reason."

The train was stopping at the Fifty-third Street station and Letitia rose, prepared to get out. As a matter of fact, I had been enjoying myself immensely. My words had been addressed to Letitia, but they were selfishly designed for my own delectation. I liked to hear myself talk—in which respect, I resembled a good many other people I knew.

"Sit down, Letitia," I said, "I've finished. I just wanted to relieve myself of a few thoughts, which seemed relevant to the occasion."

"Everybody is looking at you," she asserted in vexation, "and—I'll get out, Archie, if you continue.

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What must these people think of a young man, excitedly discussing the ethics of food in the Sixth Avenue elevated railroad?"

"In a train positively littered with advertisements of food," I added savagely. "All around us are legends of pickles, and biscuits, and sauces, and catsup—and horrid things that are bought cooked, because we live in a country where the art is unknown, and where the cooks talk of Christian principles. You are not logical, Letitia. It seems to me that this is the very place where, if you don't think of food, advertisers lose their money."

"Well, think of it," muttered Letitia defiantly, "but don't talk about it."

"Following the example of English and Americans in the matter of immorality," I couldn't help saying. Then lightly: "Well, Letitia, you must admit that I am bright. You may not appreciate my clever remarks, but I'm sure they would make a hit in print."

"Not with me, dear," retorted my unappreciative wife. "I think they're silly, and old, and book-y, and I like you better in a home mood. I've never seen you as obstreperous as this before, and it has handicapped Mrs. McCaffrey for me, as she was the cause of it. And now, here I am at my station, and—you can ride back to yours. Don't work too hard to-day, Archie,

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and take a good luncheon—something warm and nourishing. I'm sure that you are not quite well, and I shall call in Dr. De Voursney if you have any more of these alarming symptoms to-night."

"One thing, Letitia," I said rather penitently, for it began to dawn upon me that I had made an ass of myself. "Mrs. McCaffrey advertises herself as a widow. Well, I want you to make sure that Mr. McCaffrey is good and dead, and that we don't get a cook-in-law as well as a child."

And this time Letitia laughed and dropped a curtsey, as I lifted my hat and left her.

CHAPTER IX

Smiling, radiant, and in her prettiest evening gown—a felicitous blend of refinement and simplicity that the most abjectly Sarah-Jane mind would scarcely dare to think of as a confection—my brave Letitia met me as I returned from the sordid bread-and-butter struggle to sweet domesticity. And I could see that the dove of peace had temporarily descended upon my miniature household. It was Letitia of the honeymoon; Letitia of Ovid and Cicero; Letitia, the provocative, the mutinous, the delightful! It was no longer the Letitia of tinted Anna Carter, and bleary Mrs. Potzenheimer, and the delicatessen dinner! I heaved a sigh of relief as she kissed me affectionately.

“They’re here, Archie,” she said jubilantly, as I walked into her parlor with elastic step, “and I had no trouble at all. Mrs. McCaffrey received me most respectfully—she was her own best reference—and I made my decision quickly. She has been here about an hour, and took possession of the kitchen as though she were not a bit ashamed of it.”

“Tell me all, dear,” I asked hopefully, as I began

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to struggle into my evening clothes all laid out on the bed for me by Letitia.

"There's nothing to conceal," declared Letitia amiably. "I was sorry you put it into my head to ask about her husband. You remember, dear, you insisted that he must be good and dead. And you see, I am clay in your hands, Archie. Poor woman! She showed me a picture of his tombstone, in an elegant gold frame, and then burst into tears. He was forty-eight, and his name was Michael."

"And she spoke of him as Mike?" I interrupted.

"How *did* you guess?" cried Letitia. "Yes, she did. How she cried, poor soul! He was a drunkard, but very kind to her. I suppose there *are* really good drunkards, Archie, as well as bad ones. We only hear of the bad ones, yet surely some natures must be improved by alcohol. Evidently, Mr. McCaffrey's was. He drank himself to death and, in his last moments of delirium tremens, she heard him say brokenly, 'You can always cook for a living, Birdie.' "

"Birdie!" I exclaimed, dropping my collar-button.

"Oh, I was very firm, Archie. I was, indeed. I quite realized the indignity, the indelicacy of such a name for a cook. And it was not a pet name used exclusively by her husband. She was christened Birdie, and she showed me dozens of letters, all addressed to

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Mrs. Birdie McCaffrey. I thought it best to start in a determined way, and I told her that my husband was a dreadful crank."

"Letitia!"

"I just *said* it, Archie, as I thought it would carry weight. I insisted that you would never, never call her Birdie, as you were rather old-fashioned. At first she was indignant when I suggested that we call her Mary, and she actually asked me how you would like it if she called you Tom. That was insolent, and I snubbed her quickly. I think I did the novel-heroine's act. I drew myself up to my full height and rustled away from her. She came to her senses and compromised on her second name, which is Miriam—Birdie Miriam McCaffrey. Miriam isn't so bad, is it, Archie? It's a bit Biblical, and has a sort of 'sound the loud timbrel' flavor. But I've come to the conclusion that regular cooks' names are not possible in New York, and Miriam might be worse. It's much better than Hyacinth, or Guinevere, or Ermyntrude. Imagine calling out 'Ermyntrude, bring in the pie.' So you must really stretch a point, Archie, and offer no objections to Miriam."

"Am I such a dreadful tyrant, Letitia?"

"You silly boy," she exclaimed laughing, "don't you think it for a moment, dear. But with cooks, a

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tyrannical husband always sounds well. I must confess that I made you out to be most overbearing, arrogant, autocratic, and even insulting at times. You don't mind, dear. I thought it best. A man in the house, nowadays, means nothing. Men are so weak. But a bully—”

“I wish you wouldn't, Letitia,” I said irritably, “I don't fancy being held up as a bully. Where's the sense? And where's the fun?”

“I was not thinking of fun, dear. Please be docile, Archie, and leave household matters to me. You won't regret it. Of course, I know that you are not a bully, but my cooks must think that you are one, until they find out what a meek, good-natured, foolish, old fossil of a silly old husband you are.”

With which she knotted my tie for me, shook me by my shoulders, and led me into the drawing-room.

“The child!” I exclaimed. “You've forgotten the child. Tell me about it.”

There was no need to do so. Hardly had I spoken when the defunct Michael McCaffrey's legacy to posterity joined us in the drawing-room. It was a mouse-colored little brat, with hair that looked like blankets, watery eyes that seemed to be edged with pink tape, a sticky face and hands, the dirtiness of which would probably be called picturesque in Italy, and in some-

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body else's drawing-room, and the delightful aspect of those dear little things that play about the gutters of the east side. Its nose was disgusting, and when I say that I do not refer to the shape of the organ. The child ran up immediately to a green velvet ottoman and began affectionately rubbing it the wrong way with the sticky hands.

"Ga-ga!" it said. "Ga-ga! Ga-ga!"

"Come away!" I cried, scenting the ruin of the ottoman.

"Come here, dear," said Letitia gently, but the child paid not the slightest heed. "I hadn't seen it before, Archie, as it was playing in the street when I called on Mrs. McCaffrey. It isn't—it isn't"—in a disappointed tone—"it isn't a bit cute."

"Ga-ga! Ga-ga!" shouted the brat.

"Mrs. McCaffrey must not allow the child to run wild," I said sternly. "We can't do with it in the drawing-room, Letitia. It must stay with its mother. You must insist upon that. It is certainly not an ornament to a room. A little cold water and some soap—"

"I wonder if it is a boy or a girl," mused Letitia, as she pulled the hands of the brat from the green velvet ottoman to which they stuck. "Mrs. McCaffrey didn't tell me. How *can* I find out?"

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"Ask Miriam," I said sarcastically. "She ought to know."

"You can always tell whether cats are gentlemen or ladies by the shape of the head," Letitia went on irrelevantly, "but children are puzzles. This dirty little thing looks like a boy, Archie. I'm quite sure that it can't be a girl. I forgot to ask, and we really ought to know, don't you think?"

At that moment a loud voice was heard calling, "Letitia! Letitia!" And then: "Letitia! Where on earth is Letitia?" For a minute after there was dead silence. Letitia flushed, and an expression of violent anger dawned upon her face. I was too amazed to say anything. After what my wife had told me of Mrs. McCaffrey's bitter antipathy to a change of name, this looked like revenge. She undoubtedly proposed to show Letitia that she had no intention of changing *her* name. The child ran quickly to its mother, and we were left alone, in a tumult of astonishment.

"You must go and veto that, instantly, Letitia," I asserted gravely. "Stop it at once, before—before she calls me Archie. She'll do it. I know she will."

"You go," pleaded Letitia in fervent tones. "Do it for me, Archie. I've done so much."

"No," I declared relentlessly, "I will not interfere

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in household matters. You have asked me not to do so. You can tell her again that I am a bully, and a tyrant, and anything you choose. It sounds well, you know. You can put it all down to me, and inform her that if she dares to use your Christian name again she can depart to No. 33 Sixth Avenue, up one flight—or two flights—or any number of flights."

Letitia scarcely waited until I had finished my chaste remarks. She flew out of the room as though she had been shot, with the evident intention of striking while the iron was heated. I closed the door because I had no desire to hear. Perhaps it was an act of cowardice on my part, but, after all, Letitia herself absolved me from implicating myself in these matters. She had asked me to leave everything to her, and I had no intention of thwarting her in this instance.

She returned presently, looking completely relieved. There was even a smile upon her lips.

"How silly we were, Archie!" she said, sinking into a chair, "and how ready we were to think the worst of a poor, hard-working woman. She wasn't calling me at all. She heard the child in the drawing-room, and was calling the child. It *is* a girl, Archie, and its name is Letitia."

"Letitia!" I gasped. "That beastly, sticky, obnoxious little imp is named Letitia?"

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"Is it such a fearful name?" she asked quickly. "I can't say you are complimentary, Archie. Of course, Mrs. McCaffrey didn't know that the child was going to be 'beastly,' 'sticky,' and 'obnoxious' when she called it Letitia. How should she? I felt quite amused, as it is such a strange name to have selected. And yet, it is not at all an extraordinary name when you come to think of it. I know several Letitiyas, and I have read of many more."

"Do be sensible, my girl," I said, trying to be patient. "Surely you must see that we can't have this woman calling Letitia all over the house, when it happens to be the name of the mistress."

"But what's to be done?" she asked. "If you are going to suggest that I ask Mrs. McCaffrey to change her daughter's name to Eliza, or Susan, or Sarah—well, I simply decline. Nothing on earth would induce me to do it. I made her consent to be known as Miriam, instead of Birdie, which was quite an undertaking. No more of it for me, thank you. I've finished juggling with these baptismal arrangements. You are most unreasonable. What difference can it make? As long as I don't mind, I can't see why you object. And—and—if there must be a change of name, I'd sooner change mine. Yes, I would, Archie. You can call me Sarah, or Eliza, or Susan, if you like. But I

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will *not* ask Mrs. McCaffrey to forego the pleasure of calling her own child by its own legitimate name."

"I certainly shall *never* call you Eliza, Letitia," I protested indignantly, "I loathe all those names. If you had been called Eliza, or Sarah, or Susan—or even Kate—I wouldn't have married you. I feel very strongly on the subject. Please don't suggest such ridiculous things."

"Well," said Letitia, and the tears rose to her eyes, "can't you—can't you—address me as 'dear,' or 'love,' as much as possible? You are awfully fond of calling me 'my girl,' you know. It would simplify matters so much, if you could do this, Archie. Please do. It can't be difficult, as you do it so frequently, and now when you know that it is really necessary—"

"It seems such a dreadful shame to give up the name of Letitia, which is charming, just for the sake of this woman's squalid little cub. It's an outrage. I'm surprised at you, my girl."

"There! You said 'my girl,'" she cried triumphantly. "Now, wasn't it easy?"

"I didn't know I said it," was my stern rejoinder, "and I assure you that I don't intend to make any point of it. I shall do as I choose and, anyway, if that brat is kept out of sight and hearing—and that you must insist upon—we shall not be seriously inconve-

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nenced. The lower classes to-day are simply impossible. They—”

“Hush, Archie!” said Letitia earnestly. “You forget that there are no lower classes. You are in the United States, and not in England. Try and remember that Michael McCaffrey’s child is just as suited to the name of Letitia, as is the wife of Archibald Fairfax, a gentleman who is still silly enough to tack an ‘Esq.’ to his name.”

“Dinner’s on table,” said a rich, Hibernian voice at the door, and we guiltily stopped short. Mrs. McCaffrey stood there eying me contemplatively, and even from the cursory glance she was able to take, I felt perfectly sure that she instantly realized the fact that Letitia’s stories of the bully and tyrant that dominated the household, were undoubted myths. She was a large lady, neatly dressed. Indications seemed to point to her possession of what is popularly known as a “temper.” And perhaps the late Mr. Michael McCaffrey was fully aware of what he was doing when he drank himself to death.

It was a cozy little dinner of barley soup, very appetizing; a tender chicken, ably accompanied with parsley sauce; vegetables, and a fruit pie. But its enjoyment was effectually marred by the circumstance that Miriam was accompanied to the dining-room by

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Letitia, who was growing peevish, and whose "Ga-ga!" simply got on my nerves. It was most discouraging. Tugging at cook's apron incessantly, Letitia junior was an irritating obstruction. We could scarcely hear ourselves talk for the perpetual "Ga-ga!" in the kitchen, and out of it. It was all that the cub could say. Mrs. McCaffrey would exclaim indulgently, "Be quiet, Letitia!" And then, for a moment, my wife would look at her in amazement, while I bit my lip in vexation. I was unable to decide as to whether Anna Carter's delicatessen dinner, without "Ga-ga!" was superior or inferior to Mrs. McCaffrey's comfortable meal with it. It was a nice point, and one that called for a deft and finely calculated judgment.

"I've got two Letitiyas now to wait on, I see," said cook pleasantly, as she brought in the pie, while the child looked at it covetously and said "Ga-ga!"

"And if you could manage to keep one of them in the kitchen, my good woman," I plucked up courage enough to say, "we should appreciate it."

This was a mistake on my part. A few seconds later, doleful sounds proceeded from Mrs. McCaffrey's region. We heard her slapping the child, and alluding to it as a plague, and—that settled Letitia.

"Now see what you've done," she said, casting indignant glances at me. "You have positively driven

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the poor mother to abuse her own child. You are countenancing cruelty. I couldn't stand it for a moment, Archie. The child has done nothing. It has merely followed cook into this room, which was quite natural. It has said nothing."

"Pardon me," I interrupted, in vexation, "it has said 'Ga-ga!' It has said 'Ga-ga!' persistently, and while you may consider that enlivening, Letitia, I don't. If I had a child of my own, nothing on earth would induce me to allow it to say 'Ga-ga!' It is most disheartening."

"Well, I shall teach it to say something prettier," Letitia declared. "I admit that 'Ga-ga!' isn't cunning, all the time. Once or twice, perhaps, it is not amiss. In the meantime, if Mrs. McCaffrey slaps little Letitia—my namesake, isn't she, Archie?—out of the house she goes. I'd sooner she ill-treated big Letitia. And you are so tender-hearted that I wonder you can sit there so quietly—like a—like a—monster—"

Letitia rose and went into the kitchen. I fancied that I heard her kissing Mrs. McCaffrey's cub, but I could not be sure—and preferred *not* to be sure. It was a point upon which I desired no illumination. It was one of the many things that it is better not to know. Sullenly, I finished my dinner alone, while Letitia talked with cook. It seemed like an endless

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conversation. These kitchen interludes began to pall upon me. Letitia was either putting a cook to bed or discussing maternity with her. There seemed to be no escape from this preposterous condition of affairs. If I had slapped Letitia, Mrs. McCaffrey would probably have been up in arms about Christian principles. However, it was like the case of my old Oxford servant, before mentioned, who was such a Christian that he used to beat his wife punctually at ten o'clock every night. Not that she minded in the least. My own opinion is that she liked it, as Mrs. McCaffrey's child probably did. In this, as in many other matters, there is no accounting for taste.

I went moodily to the drawing-room and smoked viciously. I made "rings," and watched them dissolve in the atmosphere. I contrasted what was, with what should be. The scene lacked the placid picture of Letitia reading Cicero beneath the rosy lamplight. Letitia was haranguing a cook and her husband was temporarily forgotten. No wonder that I felt bitter, and brooded over the unsolved enigma known as the "servant question."

When Letitia joined me, she led in the dirty brat by the hand. The juvenile McCaffrey had evidently been washed. There was a line round its neck that

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showed the limit of the operation. It had a sugar stick in its mouth, which mercifully excluded "Ga-ga!" from utterance. Letitia seemed rather thoughtful, and came up to me gently.

"I'm sorry if I spoke harshly," she said, kissing me, "but—but—things do seem to go so wrong, dear, don't they? I told Mrs. McCaffrey never to touch her child again, and I asked her about her Christian principles."

"Good!" I exclaimed savagely.

"She was rather surprised, and a trifle impertinent, and thought that ladies without children should not offer advice to mothers. From a few remarks that she let drop unconsciously, I couldn't help thinking, Archie, that she has had other children—plenty of them—dozens—"

"Let us hope that they are dead," I said, in the quietude of despair.

"Anyway, they don't matter, do they, as they are not here? Certainly, Archie, I don't see why she shouldn't have had other children. Letitia doesn't look to me like a first-born. She suggests the end of a long scale—the culmination of a series. I don't know why. It doesn't concern us, though. I have offered to take care of the child this evening as Mrs.

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McCaffrey is going to see a sister who lives in Tremont. I couldn't well refuse, could I? We are not going out."

"Oh, hang it!" I cried. "An evening of 'Ga-ga!' You might have considered *me*. It is all very well to think so much of Mrs. McCaffrey. But, of course, I haven't a sister in Tremont, and I've got to stay in and face the music."

"Archie! Archie!" Letitia pleaded, "you are getting to be a regular old, discontented, married man. You are beginning to talk to me as though—as though I irritated you, and you couldn't stand me. Oh, dear! I should never, never have thought that merely on account of a cook—"

"Of three cooks!" I insisted.

Letitia turned away from me, looking miserable, and my heart smote me. The only thing to do was to make the best of it, after all. I had a particular objection to degenerating into an ogre-husband, and probably I had been exceedingly cross. Yet this situation was not due to Letitia any more than it was to me. It was due to the probably noisome Mr. McCaffrey, now defunct. He was responsible for the abominable child, and had gone peacefully to his rest without a qualm. Even cook, herself, was powerless. Domesticity was not all beer and skittles. So I smiled,

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and tried to look pleasantly at the brat. It was not an easy task, especially when I heard the front door shut and realized that the cook-parent was on her way to Tremont, and our fate was "Ga-ga!" until bed did us part. The child was eating the sugar sticks avidly, and was refreshingly tranquil and silent. I took up an evening paper, hoping for the best; Letitia made a feint at Ovid with one eye on the juvenile McCaffrey.

This did not last long. The brat grew restless and wandered disconsolately around the room, leaving traces of sticky fingers everywhere. Letitia merely pretended to read; I could see that. She followed the child around with one eye, but said nothing, probably unwilling to disturb me. Poor Letitia! The idea that she was frightened of me was appalling. I could never endure that. I tried to lose myself in absorbing stories of fires, and abductions, and murders. The murders seemed particularly lively—almost sporty. Then I made up my mind to be good-natured and was even planning a game of hide-and-seek, or blindman's-buff, or hunt-the-slipper with Letitia and the McCaffrey cub, when my good intentions were shattered.

The child began to yell. It put its finger in its mouth and shouted. Great tears rolled down its cheeks. Its face was distorted. It threw itself down

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on the tiger-head and commenced to kick. The room was filled with this alarming demonstration. Letitia rose, her face white; I stood up suddenly, aghast at the din.

"Great goodness!" cried Letitia in consternation. "It is a fit, I think—or a convulsion—or a paralytic stroke. What's to be done, Archie? Suppose—suppose—it dies before Mrs. McCaffrey gets back? Oh, if I were only a mother, I should know what to do. Why—I wonder why I'm not a mother!"

We were both kneeling beside the child, who was still shouting blue murders. Letitia lifted it up and held it upon her lap. I don't know what I did. I fancy I stroked a head—but I don't know whether it was Letitia's or the child's. To add to the complexity of the situation the front-door bell rang, and I was obliged, in this cookless emergency, to go to the door. Mrs. Archer had called to know what was the matter, and to ask if she could be of any assistance. She followed me into the drawing-room, and, as well as I could, I explained the case. Letitia, herself, was almost hysterical and was unable to greet the newcomer, or to introduce me formally to her sister victim in the Potzenheimer incident.

"There's nothing at all the matter with the child," declared Mrs. Archer authoritatively, after a cur-

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sory examination. "It's just fractious, Mrs. Fairfax. See—how all the time, it is pointing to that cabinet with the little Indian ivory ornaments in it. It is merely crying for the ornaments. Just try it. I bet that if you open that cabinet all this agony will cease."

For a moment I thought our neighbor was joking. The obstreperous lamentations, the blood-curdling howls, the violent convulsions of distress could only have proceeded from dire physical anguish. Letitia, upon whose forehead the beads of perspiration stood in horrid salience, put the child down, and in a frenzied manner rushed to the little mahogany inlaid cabinet with the glass doors. The key was in the lock and she turned it quickly. The door flew open, revealing a little ivory doll, a wheel-barrow, a pagoda, a horse, a chess-table, a group of animals, three Indian gentlemen in summer garb, and a whole stand of pretty little Indian treasures that an uncle of mine had once bought in Calcutta.

The screams of the child suddenly ceased. The flux of tears was instantly stayed. The wild moans no longer rent the atmosphere. It got up on its feet, in the twinkling of a double bedpost, as it were, and with a whoop of joy, scampered to the ivory collection.

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“Ga-ga!” it cried. “Ga-ga!”

“Oh, Mrs. Archer!” almost sobbed Letitia in an ecstasy of gratitude—and to my horror she kissed the stranger on both cheeks (and she had never been introduced)—“you’ve saved us—you’ve saved us! Oh, I thought it was dying—that perhaps the candy had poisoned it—and that when cook returned, all we should have to hand her would be a corpse.”

“A very badly brought up child, Mrs. Fairfax,” was Mrs. Archer’s solemn comment. “What it really needed was a good spanking.”

“Oh, no,” exclaimed Letitia, “never. Corporal punishment is so detestable, and so uncivilized. And for a mere baby! The mother slapped it while we were at dinner, and I gave her a piece of my mind.”

“Well, now you are going to give the child several pieces of your collection,” Mrs. Archer said airily—she seemed to be a most sensible and worthy woman—“and, of course, if you don’t mind, it is all right. Personally, I never believe in spoiling children. But—well I am so glad it is nothing more than temper, dear Mrs. Fairfax, and dear Mr. Fairfax. I fancied that perhaps a murder was being committed, and although Mr. Archer warned me not to implicate myself in such matters—he is a very suspicious man, is Mr.

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Archer—I felt that common decency necessitated my giving you any assistance that lay in my poor power."

Mrs. Archer discreetly withdrew, and I mixed a glass of weak whisky-and-water for Letitia, who was still quite limp from the fray. We were both of us inordinately thankful, for what had seemed like a tragedy was averted.

"Only to think," remarked Letitia, haply restored to serenity, "that I know so little about children. I positively don't deserve to have any. This is really an experience, Archie, isn't it? Such a terrible commotion all hushed up by a few ivory trifles."

We looked at the cabinet. It had been rifled of its contents. The "few ivory trifles" were all over the floor. The tiny wheel-barrow had been robbed of its wheels; the pagoda was even then in process of smash; the dainty little chess-table had a leg missing. But the McCaffrey cub was joyous and smiling, and as we approached it, called out "Ga-ga!"

"Uncle Ben said they were very valuable, Letitia," I remarked rather wearily. "One or two of them, he told me, could never be duplicated. The work is very fine and artistic."

"Ga-ga!" cried the brat, as it tore off another leg from the chess-table. "Ga-ga!"

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"It *is* rather cute when it's pleased," Letitia declared, smiling in spite of the devastation. "Any way, Uncle Ben's present has been very useful, Archie. Nobody ever really looked into that cabinet, and it is in a dark corner of the room. I can put in a few little oddments from the five-and-ten-cent store, and they will look very well behind glass, and we can always say that Uncle Ben brought them to us from Bombay—or was it Calcutta?"

We sat there placidly and watched the ruthless destruction of the Indian treasures, anxious that they should not pall upon the McCaffrey darling. Letitia, I am quite certain, was prepared to break up the piano and give the pieces to the cub to play with, if necessary. But peace seemed more than usually delightful. Only once did another outbreak appear possible. It was when, at eleven o'clock, Letitia suggested that the child be put to bed. A mournful howl was wafted from the cabinet, and we decided to take no risks.

Just before midnight, Mrs. McCaffrey was sighted by Letitia at the window, and a delightful sense of security became ours.

"I shall tell her," said Letitia, before opening the door, "that we have had a fearful time, and have been beside ourselves, so to speak."

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And as the amiable Hibernian came in, and we delivered over the child to her, Letitia explained the situation, adding that we had been horribly alarmed and distressed.

"Oh, it's nothing," said Mrs. McCaffrey indulgently. "Letitia's often taken like that. She has a bad temper, like her father. Don't pay any attention to her again, Mrs. Fairfax. Just let her howl. She won't mind it."

CHAPTER X

"Let us take a night off and enjoy ourselves, my girl," I said at breakfast in one of those elaborately, "off-hand" manners that so frequently betoken profound premeditation. "Somehow or other, we seem to be getting into a groove, and—missing things. Don't you agree with me, Letitia? A nice little dinner down town and a theater will cheer us up wonderfully. We owe it to ourselves, I think, and—well, I believe in paying that kind of debt, and not letting the account drag on," I added felicitously.

"Oh, yes," Letitia assented rather meditatively, and without enthusiasm, "it would be very nice. Not that I feel the need of a change as much as you do, Archie. However, it will do us good, and I'll tell Miriam that we shall not be home, and that if she likes to ask her sister from Tremont to dinner, she can do so. You see, dear, I fancy she was going out to-night. That is why I hesitated about going to the theater. But she will be just as pleased to entertain Mrs. O'Flaherty here, and if you don't mind—"

"Not at all," I said magnanimously, and I really

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meant it. If cook could have more fun in our "home" than I did, she was welcome to it. Domesticity, under impossible circumstances, was not essentially gay. So set was I upon an evening of forgetfulness, that it seemed a trifle to resign our apartment temporarily to cook and "me sister, Mrs. O'Flaherty, of Tree-mont."

"I fancy little Letitia looks rather pale," pursued my wife. "The run of the house for a night will do her good, I am sure—"

The run of the house had not been denied little Letitia, though I was determined to keep silent and not argue the matter. Cook's child was not particularly dear to me. We had her for breakfast and dinner. She stood and watched me while I shaved. She had become hatefully affectionate, and abominably fond of me. When I kissed Letitia before I went to the office, the McCaffrey cub insisted upon similar treatment. This might have been touching, but it wasn't. Letitia called me hard-hearted and callous. I believe that she was a bit jealous. Although she devoted herself heart and soul to the brat, it had no use whatsoever for her. But I, who loathed it, was singled out for popularity, and the compliment made no appeal to me.

"Well, my dear," I said, as I rose from the table, "I'll take my evening clothes with me in a dress-suit-

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case, and you can call for me at the office at a quarter to seven. We'll dine until eight o'clock, and then proceed to the theater. I'll get tickets this morning. What would you like to see?"

Letitia's lack of exuberance was rather depressing. A month ago she would have hailed the prospect with joy, and an ebullition of girlish delight. At present, she was apathetic.

"Oh," she replied in a preoccupied manner, "I have no particular choice." But suddenly she brightened up, and went on: "Yes, I have, Archie. Somebody told me that *Merely Mary Ann* was absolutely charming. It is the story of a little servant girl, a drudge in a lodging-house, a pathetic figure, that—"

"No, dear," I said peremptorily, "we get all the servant girl we need in this cunning little home. I don't see why we should pay four dollars to see Mr. Zangwill's English idea—idealized, of course, for the stage. It would be cheaper to stay at home and weep over the real American thing."

"But perhaps," said Letitia thoughtfully, "if we could really feel sorry for Mary Ann, we might be less harshly disposed toward Anna Carter, or Mrs. Potzenheimer, or Mrs. McCaffrey."

"No, my dear," I murmured sadly, "it would be waste of time. I decline to see *Merely Mary Ann*.

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The subject is disgusting to me. We want to get away from ourselves when we go to the theater. We don't want to reopen wounds, and brood."

"But in this Zangwill play," she persisted, "Mary Ann inherits five million dollars, and becomes a society girl, in pink chiffon and low-neck."

"Which is immoral," I declared. "It is a nasty, low, and revolutionary idea—enough to make all cooks anarchists. Such plays should be prohibited by a censor. Positively to make a heroine of one of these creatures, who break up happy homes and make life unendurable, who seem to be responsible for everything, from race-suicide to—"

"Hush, Archie!" cried Letitia indignantly, "I can't discuss these social questions with you. I haven't been married long enough. I still consider them improper. Besides, you can't accuse Mrs. McCaffrey of race-suicide, with little Letitia—"

"Oh, they reserve the right to have as many children as they like," I retorted bitterly, "but if *you* had them, they would soon let you know what they thought of you."

"You mustn't talk to me like this, Archie," said Letitia, vexed, "you wouldn't have done so when we were engaged. I consider such conversation rowdy—just fit for the smoking-room. And as we haven't a

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smoking-room you must restrain yourself, please. However, I am willing to drop *Merely Mary Ann*. The reason I suggested it was that I thought it might make us both kinder and more indulgent."

"Imagine old Potzenheimer with five million dollars, and low-neck!" I exclaimed, outraged. "I call it absolutely nauseating."

"Not if we *could* imagine it, dear," she said gently. "Zangwill is an artist, and I hoped that if we saw the subject poetically treated, and really shed tears for Mary Ann, as Aunt Julia wrote me yesterday that she did—"

"No, Letitia. I should shed tears only for Mary Ann's employer. It is the employers who are the martyrs. It would be better and less expensive to stay at home and shed tears for ourselves. For example, I feel depressed when I think of that cabinet of Indian *bibelots* all in rack and ruin—the only present that Uncle Ben ever gave me, and he is dead!" I added lugubriously.

"How *can* you be so petty, Archie? I am surprised at you worrying about that ivory rubbish hidden away in a cabinet."

"Please, Letitia," I interrupted with dignity, "please don't call it rubbish. Uncle Ben was not the man to give his favorite nephew rubbish."

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"Oh, how we argue! How we argue!" she exclaimed desperately. "I am astonished at this acidulation of character. No more of *Merely Mary Ann*. You ask me what I want to see, and then decline to see it. It doesn't matter. I'll select something else. Suppose you get tickets for the Barrie play, *The Admirable Crichton*."

"That's more like it, old girl," I responded exultantly. "Barrie is delightful. He wrote *The Little Minister* and *Quality Street*, didn't he? He is reliable; always good—like tea. I admire his originality."

"In *The Admirable Crichton*," said Letitia, rather demurely, I thought, "there is an old nobleman, who believes in equality. His mania takes the form of treating his servants as his equals. He invites them to parties in his own drawing-room, and makes his own daughters, ladies of title, wait upon them, and ply them with cake and lemonade."

"Bosh!" I ejaculated furiously. "It must be in the air—this vile theme. It is a germ. It is a microbe. I won't pay to see such depravity on the stage. I simply refuse. I—"

"And then," Letitia went on sedately—I couldn't help fancying that she was enjoying herself, and that galled me—"they are all wrecked on a desert

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island, and the servant becomes the master of the situation, while the old nobleman fetches and carries, and proves that outside of civilization there is no such thing as social superiority."

"Ha! ha!" I laughed sarcastically. "Imagine going to a desert island to prove it. He could find proof of that right here in New York—right here in this very apartment."

"Archie!"

"Certainly he could. Moreover, it is an idea that needs no illumination, to my mind. If that is *The Admirable Crichton* I don't want to see it. I wouldn't sit it out. Possibly it might be amusing in England. Here, I should consider it insulting. The idea of letting a foreigner treat the servant question for New York. Where is the American playwright? Why don't we foster him? Why are we obliged to swallow the dramatic food made for European stomachs? The only 'servant' play I want to see, is one that places her in her true light—as the bar to marriage, the bar to family life, the bar to domesticity, the bar to digestion, to mental serenity, to—"

Letitia rose suddenly, and confronted me. "I can suggest nothing else," she asserted doggedly; "I seem unable to please you. Take tickets for anything you like."

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"There seems to be a cook in everything," I declared dejectedly, "and I want to escape it. Don't be so angry with me, Letitia. In reality, it is for your sake as much as for my own. I guess I'll take tickets for the opera. It's *Parsifal* to-night. I never read musical criticisms, as they are so prohibitively prosy, but if you can assure me that there is no cook in *Parsifal*—"

"How ignorant you are, Archie! *Parsifal* is sacred, and deals with the Holy Grail."

"Still, they might sneak a cook in," I insisted with irony. "I wouldn't put them past it. Everything is adapted, nowadays, and grand opera artists would lend themselves so easily to the rôles of cooks. However, *Parsifal* seems safe. There is less risk about it than anything else. To be sure, Wagner is rather stupefying, and you remember, dear, that we had our first quarrel after hearing *Siegfried*. It made us both so cross."

"It doesn't need *Siegfried* to do that, nowadays," she said sadly.

"I'm a brute, Letitia. I know I am. Forgive me just this once, dear, and I'll try and be better. I—I'll look on the bright side of things, and—and I won't argue so much. I'll take tickets for *Parsifal* even though they cost ten dollars apiece. The idea

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of the Holy Grail appeals to me. It doesn't sound humorous, and Barrie and Zangwill seem to be dying to vent their sense of the ridiculous upon a suffering public. So it is understood, Letitia. *Parsifal* tonight, preceded by a dainty little dinner."

"The opera begins at five," said Letitia, "and I don't think I could leave the house at that hour. It is an uncomfortable hour."

"Quite right, dear. Let *Parsifal* adapt itself to us. It is absurd to make a toil of pleasure. Besides, one never understands anything at the opera, so it doesn't really matter at what time one gets there. We will not alter our plans. I shall wait at the office for you until a quarter to seven. Then dinner, a cab, and *Parsifal*. Say that this pleases you, Letitia."

"Oh, I'm glad, dear. I want to see you pleased. I hate to have my poor boy cross and disagreeable, and misanthropic. And I am anxious to hear *Parsifal*, so that I can *say* I have heard it. You understand, Archie. Perhaps we may not enjoy it while we are there, but I know we shall be delighted when it is over, and we can truthfully say that we have sat through it. There is no glory in sitting through an amusing play. But it *is* quite a feather in one's cap to go deliberately through a performance of *Parsifal*. It is a good idea, Archie."

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Letitia put my evening clothes in a dress-suit-case, and, with a heart once more lightened, I departed. The old affection lingered in her parting kiss; she clung to me tenderly, and although the McCaffrey brat hovered around, and Letitia insisted upon my kissing its sticky face, I made no protest. The prospect of a night off made a boy of me again. I felt young, and enthusiastic, and happy.

It was not easy to buy *Parsifal* tickets. Evidently the subject of the Holy Grail, heavy, lugubrious, massive, with an elusive fantasy about it, appealed to the wearied hearts of New York. A long line of women stood making *Parsifal* investments, anxious doubtless, as we were, to spend a cookless evening. Probably these women would have winced at suggestions of *Merely Mary Ann* and *The Admirable Crichton*. I couldn't help thinking, as, in return for a twenty-dollar bill, I received a couple of pasteboard bits, that if New York managers had homes of their own, and lived the lives of the public, for which they cater, their views upon the desirability of certain plays would change. Managers are not conspicuously domestic in their habits, and they have no inkling of the real joys and sorrows of their clients. They produce plays written in other lands, for the people of other lands, and reason that human nature is the

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same everywhere. In which, I ween, they err. They are impatient and restive at their many failures, but —they continue their policy of risk.

The day passed slowly. Tamworth seemed sorry for me when I told him that I was going to the opera, and suggested that I take a pillow with me—a rather tactless remark, I thought. He had once suffered, he said, from insomnia, and the doctors had almost despaired of curing him. He grew thin and restless, through lack of sleep. He read the very dullest books he could find, every night—all the romances and historical novels—and even these that had never failed him before as a narcotic, were useless. Then, in an inspired moment, he went to the Metropolitan House and tackled *Der Nibelungenring*. Wagner triumphed over the physicians. Morpheus emerged from his hiding-place, and insomnia was vanquished. Said Tamworth: "Nowadays, if I have a return of my old complaint, I just walk up Broadway and look at the outside of the Metropolitan House. The effect is magical. I go home and sleep the sleep of the virtuous."

This was not encouraging, but I did not repine. Better a peaceful nerveless lethargy, induced by the Holy Grail, than the discordant din of horse-laugh-

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ter set in motion by ill-timed variations, in fantasy form, upon tragic domestic themes.

At six o'clock, I was left alone in the office. Tamworth went home; and so did the typists and clerks. It occurred to me that I might utilize a half-hour or so by working upon my *Lives of Great Men*, the thread of which I had lost. I was hopelessly out of tune with lives of great men. Lives of great women—the great women of the kitchen—had lured me astray. Goethe was obscured by Mrs. Potzenheimer; Molière lurked beneath the shade of Birdie Miriam McCaffrey. I found it quite impossible to concentrate my thoughts. They were diffuse, and unresponsive. They wobbled; and I abandoned my task. Instead, I donned my evening clothes, and made myself look as presentable as I could. I was alarmingly hungry, and could not repress a sensation of furtive delight at the thought that we were to dine at a restaurant, where nobody would say “Ga-ga!” and I should not have to call the waiter Miriam. We would begin steadily and industriously with oysters, and plow our way methodically through everything, until we landed safe and sound, at coffee.

Man proposes. At a quarter to seven I put on my overcoat, and went to the window to wave to Letitia as soon as I saw her approach. She was generally

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punctuality itself, and prided herself upon it. As time dragged itself slowly along, however, and the slim little figure I knew so well was not to be detected in the Twenty-third crowd, I began to get nervous and apprehensive. Perhaps there had been an accident on the elevated. I thought up all sorts of catastrophes, and when the clock struck seven I had worked myself into a distressing state of perturbation. Something had assuredly happened, and I made up my mind to wait five minutes longer before telephoning. If Letitia had left the house—as she must have done—it was not much use telephoning. Certainly Birdie—I always thought of her aggressively as Birdie—would know nothing about answering telephone rings. Moreover, she was probably vividly engaged in entertaining “me sister, Mrs. O’Flaherty, of Tree-mont.”

Seven-twenty, and no Letitia. Even if she came, we should have but forty minutes to devote to dinner. Food, however, was rapidly losing all interest for me. I grew cold as the minutes passed. A sense of powerlessness overcame me. At last I could stand it no longer, and going to the telephone I rang up my own address, and then stood, nervously shivering, until I got it.

“This is Archie,” I said tremblingly. “It is I—Archie. Who is that at the ’phone?”

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A moment's pause, then: "Birdie—I mean Miriam. You are Archie?"

My worst fears seemed about to be realized. I felt like the pain-racked husband in the little play *At the Telephone*. I scarcely dared to listen. "This is Mr. Fairfax, Mrs. McCaffrey. What has happened? Tell me quickly."

"Letitia's awful sick, and the doctor's coming to see what the matter is."

The perspiration was trickling down my face. The roots of my hair seemed to tighten. Letitia was too ill to answer the telephone! The familiarity of cook's allusion to my wife passed unnoticed in the wave of apprehension that swept over me.

"Telephone at once for the doctor, and I'll come right back," I commanded.

"The doctor's telephone doesn't work," was the reply, "and your wife has gone to fetch him. Me sister, Mrs. O'Flaherty, was too tired to go, and I had to stay with Letitia."

A ray of light! I laughed—almost hysterically. The sudden removal of the nervous tension nearly made me collapse. It was the McCaffrey brat that was "awful sick," and as I hung up the receiver, I experienced nothing but a sense of utter thankfulness. Our little dinner most assuredly was off, and the

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Holy Grail was lost. Then a normal sense of vexation set in, and I felt indignant as I thought of Letitia trotting off for De Voursney, while I was left, lamenting.

If I had only been strong-minded enough to dine in town alone, and go to the opera in solitary state! Now that I knew Letitia was unharmed, I could easily have done this, and telephoned my determination to her. Unluckily, I was not built for such a course. Such stringency might be effective, but it was beyond me. I could not take my pleasures wifelessly. The only thing to do was to go home, and I should have been impelled to this course, even if I had been expected to sit up all night with cook's brat—and I was not at all sure that Letitia would not suggest this.

My mood had changed, and despondency had set in. I put my clothes into the dress-suit-case, locked up the office, and went home as rapidly as I could, after having bestowed the two ten-dollar *Parsifal* tickets upon the elevator boy, who rather ruefully told me that he had seats for the Third Avenue Theater, where they were playing a pretty little thing called *Too Proud to Beg*. I was not too proud, however, and I begged him to take twenty-dollars' worth of opera, for my sake, which he promised to do.

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Letitia was very flushed and excited when I reached our apartment. It was she who opened the door, and I noticed that she had her hat and coat on.

"Oh, Archie, I'm so sorry," she said lachrymosely, "and I do hope that you are not disappointed. Poor little Letitia is quite ill and feverish. She has been moaning and crying 'Ga-ga!' I had to go for De Voursney, and he is here now. I couldn't send Miriam, or Mrs. O'Flaherty, or the three girls."

"The three girls?"

"Yes, Archie. Cook has three other daughters, who live with Mrs. O'Flaherty, and they are all here —very nice respectable girls."

"She has no right—"

"What can I do, Archie? Besides, they live in Tremont, so that really they don't concern us. She might have been frank, and have candidly admitted that little Letitia had sisters. But, perhaps, if you had to earn your living as a cook, dear, you would do the same thing under the same circumstances. We won't argue; I don't feel equal to it. Ah, here *is* the doctor."

Dr. De Voursney entered at that moment, and shook hands most amiably. His presence was generally reassuring, but I must admit that at present I felt no very wild sense of alarm.

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"Glad to see you, Mr. Fairfax," he said, rubbing his hands affably. "The little patient has a febrile disturbance, and I notice a stiffening of the parotid gland in front of the ear. I should say undoubtedly—in fact I can affirm—that it is a case of *cynanche parotidea*."

Letitia grew pale. "How horrible!" she exclaimed in a low voice.

"Perhaps you could give it us in English," I suggested ironically. "Mrs. Fairfax is well versed in Latin, but medical phrases, I am afraid—"

"Certainly—oh, certainly," he said, in irrepressible good humor. "I generally use Latin in apartment houses and reserve mere English for the tenements. *Cynanche parotidea* is very prevalent just at present. It is almost epidemic. Gentle laxatives and warm fomentations are really all that it is necessary to prescribe. In English, we call the malady, mumps."

"Mumps!" I murmured.

"Mumps!" exclaimed Letitia.

"It is not serious, as you may perceive. It is painful and quite ugly to look at. I shall leave some directions with the mother and shall come in to-morrow morning."

"Is it catching?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothing more so—nothing more so," he replied

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cheerfully. "It is highly contagious. It spreads through schools, through apartment houses, with the rapidity of lightning."

"Then you think that my wife might—"

"I should say it was very likely—extremely probable," he declared, beaming upon us; "still it might be worse. Now, you know, scarlet fever, at present, is raging in this neighborhood. I have just come from a house where six little children are attacked, and the seventh has all the symptoms—"

We bowed him out in a trail of depression, and stood looking at each other silently. Then Letitia slowly took off her hat and coat and I did the same, depositing my dress-suit-case in my bedroom viciously. Fate was not smiling upon us.

Miriam came bustling in, with a grim, set face. She scowled as she saw us, and placed her arms akimbo, in the style made popular by fishwives, and *Madame Angot*.

"I've packed off me sister, Mrs. O'Flaherty, and me daughters in a hurry," she said savagely. "Yer doctor says it's catching, and it's just me luck that Muriel, and Rosalind, and Winnifred should have been here. Worse luck to it, say I! Me poor Letitia, a-prattling so cutely as she's laid low by the nasty disease."

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"It is not at all serious," murmured Letitia sympathetically.

"For them as ain't got it—no, it ain't serious," said Birdie Miriam McCaffrey mockingly. "For them as ain't got it—it just tickles, that's all. Curse me for a-comin' here. That's my motto. 'The neighborhood's just alive with it,' says yer doctor. 'It's in the air. It's epileptic. Why,' says he, 'there's hardly a house where they ain't got mumps.' Nice for me, eh? If them's yer Christian principles, luring a hard-working woman, with a child, into a mumpy house, and a-saying no word to put her on her guard—"

"You can go whenever you are ready," I said loftily, "and no impertinence, please."

"As soon as my Letitia can be moved—if the poor thing ever lives through it—and I have me doubts, as she's that delicate—we'll go. Oh, we'll go, right enough. Don't you worry about that. Not if yez poured gold at me feet, and if I wuz a-perishing for want of a bit o' food, to keep body and soul together, would I stay in a house that's alive with germs. 'Yes,' says yer doctor, 'it's a germ. It's a mikey in the air.' Me poor Mike! 'A mikey in the air,' says he. And I only hope that me Muriel, and Rosalind, and Winnifred will be spared, as it's so catching. Why didn't

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ye tell me, Mrs. Fairfax? Why didn't ye say, when ye come down to Sixth Avenue, that there was diseases all around? Play fair; that's my motto. I don't believe in no underhand game, I don't. Not for me!"

As she flounced out of the room, Letitia sank into a chair and burst into tears. The twittering of Birdie had been horribly effective. It had made me feel nervous and unstrung. Logic was quite unavailing, and for the first time in my life, I realized that those with a sense of humor might have fared better than we did.

CHAPTER XI

It was undignified, but necessary. Any other course would have been impossible. It was a case of bowing to the inevitable—and it seems to me that the inevitable simply exists for the sake of the curtseys bestowed upon it by unfortunates. One is always bowing and scraping to the inevitable. It is a species of toadyism that is invariably omitted from textbooks on the sublime art of sycophancy.

The inevitable, in this particular instance, was Aunt Julia. After the vociferous, verbose, and vor-tiginous departure of Birdie Miriam and the convalescent brat, dread symptoms of *cynanche parotidaea* appeared in Letitia, herself; we were alone, helpless, and mump-ridden, and it was Letitia who suggested Aunt Julia. I made few telephonic explanations to Tarrytown. I merely begged my aunt-in-law to put a few things in a valise and come to us at once, as her niece was quite ill. This was true. By the time Aunt Julia arrived, Letitia's fair face had lost its outlines. In the grip of this most prosaic indisposition she was inclined to be irritable—particularly when she looked at herself in the glass, which she did

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every five minutes. Some patients, it is said, are amused at the facial contortions guaranteed by this ailment. They must be the patients who own a sense of humor. Letitia was awed by her own ugliness, and I must confess that I hated to look at her. She insisted upon wearing a lace mantilla over her head, and fastening it with a diamond brooch beneath her chin. Under other circumstances this might have seemed Spanish, but Letitia was cross, and when I dared to suggest that she was emulating Otero, she was most indignant, and thought my remark uncalled for.

Aunt Julia's advent was very welcome. After all, she had fine qualities. There was not a suspicion of the baleful "I told you so" in her manner. She *did* turn away her head several times, as Letitia narrated the tragic stories of Anna Carter, *La Potzenheimer*, and Birdie Miriam, but although I had a suspicion that she was exuding mirth, I could not prove it. I could not have sworn that Aunt Julia was laughing, although I followed her face round the corner, so to speak. Mercifully, Letitia was unable to do this, owing to circumstances—to say nothing of swellings—over which she had no control. My poor Letitia! If irritability were a good sign—as old women declare—her convalescence soon set in. She was as "cross as two sticks," as my old nurse used to remark.

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The worst of it was that I had to absent myself from the office until Aunt Julia arrived. I told Tamworth that my wife had tonsilitis, as I thought it sounded better and would be more evocative of sympathy. People are sorry when you say tonsilitis; they are merely amused when you mention mumps. A heroine with mumps, or even toothache, is a romantic impossibility; but tonsilitis or nervous prostration is less destructive to poetic commiseration.

"You have probably arrived at a conclusion often forced upon me," said Aunt Julia, as her keen, beady eyes roved around the room. "The happiest day after that upon which cook arrives is that upon which cook departs."

If I had dared to say that, Letitia would have exclaimed ironically, "How clever!" or, "How epigrammatic!" and I should have been instantly snubbed. As it was, she murmured a dutiful "Yes, aunt," and sat with her hands folded in her lap, meekness personified.

Aunt Julia, however, was not particularly restful to the nerves overweeningly unstrung. Even while she was listening to our history she was bustling about, arranging things, and—of course!—dusting. She flicked dust from the piano, filched it from the ornaments, dug it from the tiger-head, blew it from

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the pictures, rubbed it from the chair-backs, fought it from the window-sills. And then—if any had remained—I am perfectly certain that she would have eaten it. Dust was Aunt Julia's weakness, as it is the weakness of many women. If dust had sex, it would assuredly be masculine, as the majority of women are so disgracefully attentive to it. They run after it so rudely. It is only the intellectual, large-minded women, who don't mind a little bit of harmless dust, and can sit still comfortably while it settles and enjoys itself. The others are always pottering around after it, making their own life, and that of their associates, unnecessarily miserable. Personally, dust has always seemed to me to be homelike and cozy, and I hate to see it flagged away and routed.

"You see," said Aunt Julia triumphantly, as she lifted the clock from the mantel-piece, and revealed the huge space, surrounded entirely by thick dust, upon which it had stood, "you two children, who are always talking cooks, really need what we call a general. You want somebody who will dust as well as cook. Apparently, you have secured ladies who could do neither."

"You engaged Anna Carter for us, aunt," remarked Letitia pointedly, and I could have applauded her gladly, if I had not been in my own house.

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The opportunities for being impolite are wonderfully curtailed nowadays. Etiquette says that you must be polite in your own house; you must be polite in other people's houses. Apparently, one can be impolite only out of doors.

"And I particularly told her," said Aunt Julia emphatically, "that the main thing was to keep the place spick-and-span. I made more of a point of that than I did of the cooking. Healthy young people don't want a lot of messy '*à la*' dishes, but they do want immaculate living rooms."

"Oh, Aunt Julia—" Letitia began argumentatively.

"Oh, Aunt Julia!" mimicked the old lady. "Wait until you can afford to keep three or four servants before you put on so many airs. 'Oh, Aunt Julia!' Yes, and 'Oh, Aunt Julia' again! With your 'drawing-room' and your 'evening dress' and your menus you want a retinue of domestics. You think that all you have to do is to sit down and live artistically in the most inartistic and impossible city in the world. I say that, and I'm a good American, too. And there's no 'Oh, Aunt Julia!' about it, either."

I bit my lips, and impressed upon my mind the fact that I was in my own house. I should have liked to ask Aunt Julia to walk with me to the corner, so

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that I could say rude things to her. Of course her statements were absolutely grotesque and ridiculous, and both Letitia and I knew it. We exchanged sympathetic glances. I could have laughed in scorn at Aunt Julia. Letitia couldn't, of course, as her face was not in laughing order.

"In the meantime, Aunt Julia," I said with an effort—I *had* thought of addressing her as "Mrs. Dinsmore," but, after all, she was there at my invitation—"you see we have no servant at present. What can we do? Letitia can't leave the house; I am unable to cook a dinner; I *could* take a basket and sally forth to the delicatessen shops, but—"

"I'm here," replied Aunt Julia, spreading her hands whimsically. "Like the poor, I am always with you. And I assure you, you silly helpless things, that the situation is not too many for me. In fact, I am distinctly able to cope with it. My motto in life has been: Don't worry about being rich; don't bother about being poor; but do, for goodness' sake, make up your mind to be independent. That's it—indepen-dence. Do you fancy that a mere cook can either make or mar me? And yet, my dear Letitia, and my equally dear Archibald, I flatter myself that I am quite as good, socially, as anybody you are ever likely to meet. I have known the time when I have

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cooked an entire dinner, from soup to sweets, and sat at the head of my own table, in a low-neck dress and entertained my guests, who probably thought that I had lolled on a sofa all day, and read—er—Ovid!" she added maliciously.

This sounded horribly Sandford-and-Merton-y. I was Sandford, and Letitia was Merton, while Aunt Julia appeared to be that detestable consummation of all the virtues, Mr. Barlow. I nearly called her "Uncle Barlow," but haply refrained in time.

"I don't like the idea of your slaving, Aunt Julia," began Letitia, adjusting her mantilla.

"I don't say that I should select it as a pastime," asserted that lady, in her most formidable manner; "but when it is necessary—and it often is, even in the best regulated families (among which I do not class this household)—I am always on hand. The situation is mine, absolutely. You see my education was unlike yours, Letitia. I am saying nothing against my poor sister, Frances, your dear mother, who had her own views, but I assert that the average American woman is quite helpless and—and—the race suffers."

"Don't lecture me, please, Aunt Julia," cried Letitia feebly. "I know I'm helpless, but Archie is quite willing to pay for help, and—I can't be squalid. Excuse me, Aunt Julia."

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"Certainly," she said amiably, "I'll excuse you. You can't be squalid, but you *can* be dusty. Personally, I'd sooner be squalid, as you call it, but tastes differ, as the old lady remarked when she kissed her cow. Thank goodness, I've removed a few of the evidences of neglect. I think I'll rest for a few minutes. You sit still, Letitia, and you, Mr. Archie, don't get fidgetty. The trouble to-day is that the average New York woman who gets married doesn't want cooking, or housekeeping, or children, or the comradeship of a man. She wants diamonds for her ears, silks for her back, furs for her shoulders. She'd sooner live in an apartment that has a palatial entrance, and dark, airless cubby-holes for rooms; she'd sooner go and dine at a *table d'hôte* restaurant than order her own dinner at home; she'd sooner pant in impossible waists and flaunt herself before the world as some odious 'Gibson' freak, than stay at home in something loose, and have healthy children easily."

"Aunt Julia!" cried Letitia, aghast. "You really mustn't—before Archie."

"Please, Mrs. Dinsmore," I objected, "such things—before Letitia—"

"Don't add prudery to your other follies," retorted this terrible old lady, "I hate it. What is, is; and we might as well talk about it. Somebody has said, Le-

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titia (and it wasn't your friend Ovid, the chestnut), that decency is indecency's conspiracy of silence—which is clever. You see, I read occasionally, squalid though I be. It is a true remark. I hope you'll have children, but not until you know what to do with them, and are not as dependent upon a nurse as you are upon a cook. Then you would be treating your own children as badly as you now treat your own stomachs. Your poor stomachs!"

Involuntarily I placed my hand on the lower part of my waistcoat. There was certainly a flatness there. Strangely enough, Letitia did the same—omitting of course the waistcoat. We were both so indignant with Aunt Julia, that this silent action probably took the place of insulting words.

"Home is a thing that is going out of fashion in this city," Aunt Julia continued bitingly. "It is a place to sleep in, to get your letters at; a spot in which to blazon forth your name, for the compilers of the city directory. American women prefer to dine out, dance out, make merry out. They even like to get married—out. Probably they will have their children out, one of these days. There will be elegant caterers to expectant mothers. No, Letitia, you can't stop me. I intend to have my say. The situation

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confronts us. Let us face it, manfully or womanfully."

"You talk as though we were trying to demolish the home, Aunt Julia," said Letitia, endeavoring to infuse an expression of indignation into her poor congested face. "We are doing our best. We are anxious to live in the house, and not out of it. What are we to do? We are unfortunate."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted Aunt Julia irritably; "if I were not here at this moment, and if you, Letitia, were not indisposed, the two of you would be trotting out to your meals to-day, ruining your digestions with unhealthy food, and doing it because cook had left. 'Oh, Aunt Julia?' I anticipate that you were about to remark. Bah! I've no patience with you. Now, if instead of reading the ridiculous antiquities you affect, you were to set to work and study the—er—cook-book—"

"I shall never advise Letitia, at her age, to stupefy herself with such literature," I asserted stoutly; "I don't believe in it."

"What you believe in is of no consequence, Archibald," she declared, rising suddenly, as another dusty spot dawned upon her vision. "You can put on your things, my boy, and go to your office. I take charge.

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I guarantee you a dinner to-night—no sticky *à la* affair, but something that will appeal to a healthy appetite. Go down-town, and leave Letitia alone with me. I promise you that I shan't ask her to do anything. She can read the classics, if she likes, as long as she doesn't read 'em aloud to me. The classics in the Harlem end of Columbus Avenue! Ha! Ha! Ha! Now, vanish, Mr. Fairfax. I can't stand a man in the house, in the daytime."

"I think you're unjust, Aunt Julia," murmured Letitia; "poor Archie is so domestic. He loves to be around."

"Sitting in thick dust," added Mrs. Dinsmore, "and imagining that he's milord Tomnoddy; also encouraging you to live in the clouds. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go and introduce myself to the kitchen. No, Letitia, don't trouble to come with me, for I'm perfectly convinced that you don't know the difference between a saucepan and a corkscrew. I can find my way, and I shall amuse myself. I quite enjoy the idea of a regular, old-fashioned set-to. *Au revoir.* Dinner at six, Mr. Fairfax. By-the-by, I forgot to bring a low-neck bodice with me. Do you mind? I'll sit outside in Mrs. Potzenheimer's sanctum, if, by any chance, I should be offensive to your evening eyes."

And off she went. Letitia and I sat staring at each

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other, lacking even the gumption to smile. Upon the silence was borne the tin-ny noise of pots and pans apparently being routed and abused. A second later, and we heard Aunt Julia singing. That settled it. I closed the door. I loathe cheery kitchen music—especially *Bedelia*.

"I'll go, Letitia," I sighed; "I'm turned out. I shall advertise at once. We can't trespass upon Aunt Julia's—er—er—kindness."

"Yes, do, Archie,"—and Letitia also sighed; "Aunt Julia means well, but she's very old-fashioned. You mustn't mind what she said, dear. I dare say I don't know very much, but if I had been a kitchen-y old *Frau*, you wouldn't have liked me, and we shouldn't have been married. Of course, there *are* servants. Somebody must have them. We've had a few failures, but we'll try again."

I kissed her quite pathetically, and started office-ward with a heavy heart. It seemed delightful to get away from the mugginess of home, and I marveled at my sensations. They were so strange. The people in the streets all interested me. There seemed to be such a quantity of women. Women, women, everywhere, but not a cook to greet! A longing to pounce upon some of the nice, comfortable-looking women I saw, and cry: "Come live with me, and be

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my cook," took possession of me. We wanted so little, Letitia and I; just a domesticated home-body who would ply us with easy dishes, and let us "live our life"—as Ibsen would say. Was there anything exaggerated in these demands?

In the train, I sat opposite a most attractive looking colored person; one might have almost called her a party. She eyed me rather furtively, and had perhaps some telepathic inkling of my mood. Oh, if I had owned the courage to throw myself at her feet, and beg her to come cook for us! I lacked the necessary nerve. She looked as though she could contrive dainty Southern dishes, and I was particularly fond of terrapin. But perhaps, I told myself cynically, she couldn't even boil an egg, and I should find myself landed again in the midst of the alarms of delicatessen.

At Eighty-first Street, a neat looking young woman got in, and became the object of my culinary speculation. I liked her appearance immensely, and would have engaged her upon the spot, without references, if the opportunity had been there. I felt certain that she would get along admirably with Letitia,—my poor Letitia, who would have been so considerate and indulgent with her cooks if they had only permitted it. Why, she had even hinted at her

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intention of giving Birdie Miriam her low-neck, white chiffon bodice, in a week or two, when she had no more use for it. Fool that I was! I had argued with Letitia upon the incongruity of presenting Mrs. McCaffrey with a *décolleté* waist, and had quite vexed myself. I had told Letitia that I couldn't possibly eat stew, if a low-neck cook brought it in. It was so unnecessary, for Birdie Miriam had departed long before the gift was ready for her acceptance.

The girl who got in at Eighty-first Street appealed to me. An impulse, quite irresistible, seized me. I felt that both Aunt Julia and Letitia would look upon me as a hero, if suddenly I marched in with a splendid cook that I had fished, unaided, from an elevated train. I say the impulse was irresistible. It was. I edged up to the young woman. I tried to attract her attention by nudging her. I smiled, and was about to speak, when she rose, and in a loud voice, cried: "Say, you're too fresh! Where d'ye think ye are?"

In an instant a stout Irishman was on his feet, and I heard him mutter something about "cursed mashers." A disgraceful scene impended, and the horror of being accused of "mashing," when I was merely intent on "cook-ing," overwhelmed me. I apologized abjectly, and though I was now more certain than I

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had been before that the young woman *was* a cook, the fact that I was laying myself open to suspicion dawned suddenly upon me. The Irishman sat down glowering, presumably rather vexed at the de-materialization of a fight, and I continued my journey down-town, silently. The young woman left the train at Fifty-third Street, with a malicious, provocative smile in my direction, but I was in no mood to notice it ostentatiously.

The car was filled with smiling, radiant women, all evidently free from domestic care. My poor mind ran in the one groove only. Had they cooks? If so, how? Did they dine at restaurants? Had they homes? I listened to their conversation. It was not exhilarating; it was interspersed with "and I says," "and she says," and then, "says she to me," and "says I to her." They were jovially wallowing in a cheery labyrinth of non-refinement and banality, and it occurred to me that perhaps some of this domestic problem's difficulties lay in the fact that the mental difference between cook and her mistress was not marked enough! This was a horrid thought. Don't blame me for it. One thinks horrid things when one is gloomy and oppressed—horrid things that are also unjust.

At Twenty-third Street domestic thoughts van-

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ished. The troubles of home evaporated in that atmosphere of stately hotels, and shops, and carriages, and pretty women, and theaters. Just once these memories returned. It was when I passed the Flatiron Building, and thought, in a bitter vengeful spirit, that I would like to condemn Aunt Julia to flick dust from every window in that most oppressive pile. What a gorgeous revenge it would be!

At the office I worked automatically. I read two manuscripts that had been submitted for publication. Both were humorous, and they disgusted me. My mood was not one that the authors of those luckless manuscripts would have liked to see. It augured ill for their work. I frowned at their fantasies and ground my teeth at their airy flights. This was rank injustice, of course, and I felt it my duty to state, in declining these works, that "humor was not our specialty." I thought that rather neat. Of course, in these days of ferocious competition, the authors would feel but little discomfiture. Others would appreciate their labors. Personally, as I have said, I hate humorists. Undoubtedly there are perversities on earth who could turn my cooks to humorous account. They need never apply to me for a lift toward publicity. Humor is assuredly abnormal.

I rather dreaded the idea of going home. I had

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visions of boiled mutton, which I detest, and then there would be, perhaps—the mere idea sickened me—stewed prunes! Aunt Julia, being old-fashioned, would probably deem this menu wholesome, and American. To me it was appalling, deadening. I could see the meal before me—the loathsome prunes set before my eyes, at the same time as the meat, to confront and defy me, as I sat at table. Everything would be spotlessly clean—you could “eat your dinner off the carpet” of course—but spotlessly unappetizing.

It was a shock to me to find that Letitia had not “dressed” for dinner. She explained quickly that she was not well enough to don evening dress, but begged me to do so, and not to let Aunt Julia think that I was afraid of her. Afraid of her! Perhaps I was, but I had no intention of admitting it. I went at once to my room, selected the most immaculate shirt I possessed, decorated it with my pearl studs, and then, putting on my Tuxedo coat, I sallied forth to Letitia, who had a turpentine-soaked flannel round her neck.

Aunt Julia was in the kitchen, and I could hear her laboring at *Bedelia*, in high spirits, and an undaunted voice.

“She went out shortly after you left,” said Letitia, “and I haven’t seen her since. Of course, it is aw-

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fully good of her, Archie. She didn't even consult me as to what she should get. At any rate, dear, it's a case of beggars mustn't be choosers. Please try and be amiable."

As the clock struck six, Aunt Julia announced dinner and Letitia and I went to the dining-room. The old lady was as calm and unruffled as though she had been napping all afternoon. Her silk dress was unperturbed; her lace collar knew its place; she was not even flushed. I felt rather guilty. The table looked so nice! There were oysters at the three places; there was no vestige of a stewed prune; the table napkins were daintily folded, with a pallidly baked roll in each. It certainly didn't look a bit old-fashioned—in the abused acceptance of that phrase.

"Sit down, cook-less ones," said Aunt Julia, with a laugh, "and revel in your squalor. I haven't known what to do with myself all afternoon. The time has positively hung on my hands. I took a doze, Letitia, because there was nothing else to take. Work in an apartment! It's child's play."

We ate our oysters in a somewhat embarrassed mood. Aunt Julia was as lively as a kitten. She chatted and criticised, and asked questions, and never waited for the answers, and actually enjoyed herself. Then she skirmished quickly away with the oyster

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plates, and brought in the silver tureen, filled with strong beef soup. It all seemed to be ready at hand and piping hot, and as I tasted it, the cockles of my heart expanded and I smiled. Letitia's *cynanche* seemed remarkably better, and I don't know how it was, but the three of us found ourselves engaged in the most enlivening conversation, without having to seek for it in racked brains. Nor was it small talk.

So interested were we, that we never noticed how the soup got away. Yet it did, and I suddenly perceived before me an appetizing dish of fried smelts, nestling beside a silver receptacle containing a *sauce tartare*. It was marvelous. It was as though a conjurer had cried, "Presto!"—and behold the metamorphosis! The fish was delicious and Aunt Julia enjoyed it quite as much as we did.

"I'm very fond of my own cooking," she said. "I take a scientific interest in it. I like to see what one can do with various foods. I love experiments. I have the same interest in a *sauce tartare* that—er—Sir Oliver Lodge has in radium. One is born that way, I suppose."

I continued to expand. How could I help it? Aunt Julia seemed suddenly transfigured. She was no longer the fussy old meddler, but the Good Samaritan. I liked her silk dress, her lace collar, her

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antique cameo brooch, and with every glass of sauterne that I took, I liked them better! It was quite wonderful how they grew upon me. Letitia seemed to be equally effervescent. I quite forgot her lack of evening dress, in which she had been so resplendently imperious at Anna Carter's delicatessen spread. This was a meal at which evening dress would have been perfectly appropriate, but this meal, alas! was born of no cook's efforts. It was original. Perhaps we scarcely dared to hope for its repetition. And as this thought occurred to me, I sighed.

The chicken was roasted to perfection, and its dressing was almost poetic. An epicure would have delighted in it. Brillat-Savarin, himself, would have commented favorably. Aunt Julia explained that she had not tried to display any particularly "fancy" cooking, but she opined that this was sufficient to remove satisfactorily the edge from the ordinarily unfastidious appetite. How I had wronged her! How different was the reality to the anticipation of boiled mutton and stewed prunes! We finished with a firm and convincing jelly, and some of the best black coffee I have ever tasted outside of Paris.

It was the first comfortable meal we had enjoyed at home! It was the first time we had ever sat at our own table, to arise therefrom at peace with the world!

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"And now," said the old lady solemnly, "you two young people may go into the parlor—oh, I beg your pardon, I mean drawing-room—and your squalid aunt will clear the things away. She will be with you in fifteen minutes, ready to preach, or answer questions, or do anything you like."

Home certainly did seem like home. The drawing-room was cozy and inviting. I felt stimulated to mental effort. Letitia had forgotten her ailments, and was lively and amusing.

“I must try and learn Aunt Julia’s system,” she said, “so that I can at any rate, supervise, though, Archie, I’m quite sure that frauds like Anna Carter, or Potzenheimer, or Birdie Miriam would never brook supervision.”

“There you’re right,” remarked Aunt Julia, entering suddenly. “These women know little and what they know, they know wrong. Get a clean slate to work upon, secure a girl whom you can teach, and —well, your chances will be better.”

CHAPTER XII

We fell back upon the sublime, the luminous art of newspaper advertisement. Alluring pictures of natty maids in jaunty caps and perfectly fitting dresses, as an answer to the question, "Do you need help?" emerged from our subliminal consciousness, capped by the legend, "If so, advertise in —" So we advertised in —. Each newspaper seemed to vie with the other in exquisite promises to be-cook our kitchen. There appeared to be no possible, probable shadow of doubt about the proceeding. It was so easy that the inelegant simile of "rolling off a log" impressed us as being absolutely justifiable. I flatter myself that the advertisements I composed were delightful—gems of succinct thought, though Letitia seemed dubious.

"I think you ought to offer some inducement," she said, "in order that our advertisement should stand out from the rest—something to indicate that we really are desperate. I suppose—please don't smile, Archie—that it wouldn't do to hint that we give handsome Christmas presents."

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"What an immoral suggestion, Letitia!" I exclaimed testily. "It is putting a premium on cupidity and incompetence. I am surprised at you. Moreover, it is so horribly suggestive of the idea of beating a hasty retreat after the receipt of those presents."

"Don't be so snappy, Archie," retorted Letitia peevishly. "I am merely trying to throw light upon the situation. We ought to do something. What do you say to mentioning matinée tickets once a week?"

"Or souvenirs if she runs for a hundred nights," I suggested gloomily.

"Of course," said Letitia resignedly, "if you ridicule everything I say, there is no use my making further remarks. Put in the advertisement as you like—'Cook wanted.' How original! Eighteen hundred people want cooks, and eighteen hundred people won't get them. I merely meant to emphasize our own special need. Do you think"—suddenly—"that if we made it worth while at the newspaper offices, they would print our advertisement in red ink—right in the center of all the others—or—or in gold?"

"No, my girl," I replied shortly, pretending to look very sapient, as though I were marvelously familiar with the inner workings of newspaper offices.

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Then, conciliatingly, "Your idea is good, Letitia, but impracticable. We must take our chance with the vulgar herd."

"At any rate," she cried despairingly, "you can surely say that this is a lovely, refined home, with scarcely anything for a cook to do, and—and—paint it up, Archie; paint it up. Moreover, we want a clean slate, as Aunt Julia suggested—something inexperienced for me to teach."

To my credit, be it said, I did not smile. The effort to resist was intense, almost painful, but I succeeded in maintaining an owl-like expression, and Letitia's quick glance at me—a glance that seemed to suggest that she expected and dreaded a smile—was wasted.

We advertised in five papers, and the sense of elation that came with the deposit of each advertisement was most refreshing. It looked as though failure were impossible. Letitia calculated that seven million people in New York would know of our need, and when I told her that there were not seven million people in the greater city, she airily decided that some of them therefore would know it twice—a piece of logic that needed no squelching. That evening, that cook-less evening of waiting, after a restaurant din-

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ner that had been particularly indigestible and sad-dening, we discussed in low voice the possibilities of the morrow.

Five advertisements ! Letitia wondered what the neighborhood would think of the crowd of aspiring, eager cooks that must assuredly besiege our door. She even suggested that I notify the nearest police station, and ask for a special squad of police to keep order. Her enthusiasm was contagious. I pictured the battling mob outside—long lines of throbbing, expectant women clamoring for an interview. The moral effect of advertising is quite irresistible. It is not to be gainsaid. Whatever the mere practical results may be, there is no doubt in the world but that advertisement, psychologically, is worth its price. The notion that from all the readers of five important newspapers, entering into all the nooks and crannies of metropolitan life, a huge and varied collection of cooks would fail to materialize was ridiculous. It was not to be entertained for a moment. Letitia even mentioned the possibilities of the poor women waiting outside all night on camp stools ; in fact, taking a look into the electric-lighted street, at about eleven o'clock, she announced positively that she saw two women already standing outside the door.

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"If I were quite sure that they were applicants," said Letitia, "I'd ask them up at once, and listen to them. Perhaps we ought to send out a little soup or hot coffee."

I remembered my experience in the elevated train. It recurred to my mind so vividly that I uttered a "Pshaw!" rather brusquely, and then meekly told Letitia that she was probably mistaken.

"You see," remarked Letitia thoughtfully, "five advertisements in one day, are rather unusual. There are bound to be results. Think of the colossal population of Greater New York! In fact, Archie, I really feel a bit afraid. We have perhaps reared a Frankenstein. I am not at all sure that I can cope with an immense crowd."

My rest that night was fitful. I had nightmare of a most distressing nature, which I will refrain from describing for the reason that daymare seems more popular, as a rule, with readers. Letitia rose at seven o'clock just as I had fallen into refreshing slumber, and went, in her nightgown, into the drawing-room to note the line of cooks from the window. I was unable to sleep again, and lay there awaiting her return, anxious and uncomfortable.

She came back, looking like Lady Macbeth, and

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exclaimed in a voice of dire amazement: "Not a soul, Archie! Positively, there's not a human creature in the street. What can it mean?"

"It's early," I suggested feebly.

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Letitia. "Out of four million people, there must be a very large percentage that doesn't regard seven o'clock as so frightfully early. Perhaps the police, seeing a mob, ordered it to disperse and reassemble later. At any rate, we had better get ready. How annoying! I forgot all about breakfast, and we can not leave the house. I must prepare some coffee, and with the crackers that Aunt Julia bought, we must make shift."

After this meal, that was strangely lacking in solidity and in various other qualities—Letitia's coffee tasting like slate-pencils, only not quite so nice—we stationed ourselves at the window. We saw cable-cars, horse-cars, wagons, cabs, perambulators. We noted tradesmen, and tradeswomen, schoolgirls and schoolboys, business-men and business-women. There was plenty to look at, but there was no cook. Letitia grew restive; I became nervous. Every feminine creature that approached seemed to be a cook—until she went past. We looked at each petticoated passer-by, with the avid expectation of hearing her ring our door-bell and ask to be taken in.

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"There's one!" cried Letitia excitedly. "I bet you anything that she's going to ring. How shabby her skirt is, poor thing. And just look at her hat! She is reading the numbers on the doors. Yes, she's stopping here. She—she—"

Went by.

"This time," I exclaimed, "I'll wager anything that—look, Letitia!—the girl opposite is going to apply. She has a newspaper in her hand and she keeps reading it. I'm not often mistaken, Letitia. When I do venture a prophecy, it is generally correct. Ah, I told you so. She is looking up at us. She has crossed the street. She has examined the house. She—she—"

Went next door.

Mariana, in her moated grange, may have had an unpleasant time of it, as she "glanced athwart the glooming flats." (I should have indignantly called them "blooming" flats, but unfortunately I'm not Tennyson.) Then, in Mariana's case, "old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors," which must have made things cheerful for her. With us, neither old faces nor young ones "glimmer'd" through anything whatsoever. Gladly would we have hailed them, for, in good sooth, we were "aweary, weary." We "drew the casement curtain by"—Letitia begged me to be careful,

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as it had just been done up—and stood there, stolidly, silently. There were no moldering wainscots, or flitting bats, or rusted nails, or oxen's low. In spite of which I am perfectly convinced that Mariana was less miserable than we were, as at eleven o'clock, the awful certainty was borne in upon us that "she cometh not."

"Perhaps," said Letitia dejectedly, "we are the victims of conspiracy. Anna Carter, and Mrs. Potzenheimer, and Birdie Miriam McCaffrey may have banded themselves together to—to ruin us."

"Letitia!"

"There is some reason for all this, Archie. It is to be accounted for in some way. It is absolutely impossible that five important advertisements in five important newspapers should have produced no fruit whatsoever. I shall write to each paper and say, 'After advertising in your valuable columns, I have come to the conclusion that you are no good.'"

"Why antagonize the newspapers?"

"I must have the satisfaction of recording our experience," she replied, her face flushed, her eyes bright. "I shall do it, Archie. I intend—"

At that moment there was a ring at the front doorbell. Letitia, wrought-up, nervously clutched my arm. For a moment a sort of paralysis seized me. Then, alertly as a young calf, I bounded toward the

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door, hope aroused, and expectation keen. It was rather dark in the outside hall and I could not quite perceive the nature of our visitor. But I soon gladly realized that it was something feminine, and as I held the door open, a thin, small, soiled wisp of a woman glided in, and smiled at me.

“*Talar ni svensk?*” she asked, but I had no idea what she meant. She may have been impertinent, or even rude, or perhaps improper, but she looked as though she might be a domestic, and I led her gently, reverently, to Letitia in the drawing-room. I smiled back at her, in a wild endeavor to be sympathetic. I would have anointed her, or bathed her feet, or plied her with figs and dates, or have done anything that any nationality craves as a welcome. As the front door closed, I heaved a sigh of relief. Here was probably the quintessence of five advertisements. Out of the mountain crept a mouse, and quite a little mouse, too!

“*Talar ni svensk?*” proved to be nothing more outrageous than “Do you speak Swedish?” My astute little wife discovered this intuitively. I left them together, my mental excuse being that women understand each other and that a man is unnecessary, under the circumstances. I had some misgivings on the subject of Letitia and *svensk*, but the universal lan-

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guage of femininity is not without its uses. I devoutly hoped that Letitia would be able to come to terms, as the mere idea of a cook who couldn't excoriate us in English was, at that moment, delightful. At the end of a quarter of an hour I strolled back to the drawing-room. Letitia was smiling and the hand-maiden sat grim and uninspired.

"I've engaged her, Archie," said Letitia. "She knows nothing, as she has told me, in the few words of English that she has picked up, but—you remember what Aunt Julia said about a clean slate."

I gazed at the maiden, and reflected that while the term "slate" might be perfectly correct, the adjective seemed a bit over-enthusiastic. She was decidedly soiled, this quintessence of a quintette of advertisements. I said nothing, anxious not to dampen Letitia's very evident elation.

"She has no references," continued my wife, "as she has never been out before. She is just a simple little Stockholm girl. I like her face immensely, Archie—immensely. She is willing to begin at once, which shows that she is eager, and consequently likely to suit us. Wait for me, Archie, while I take her to the kitchen. *Kom, Gerda.*"

Exactly why Letitia couldn't say "Come, Gerda," seemed strange. She probably thought that *Kom*

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must be Swedish, and that it sounded well. She certainly invented *Kom* on the spur of the Scandinavian moment, and I learned afterward that it was correct. My inspired Letitia! Still, in spite of all, my opinion is that "Come, Gerda," would have done just as well.

"Isn't it delightful?" cried Letitia, when she joined me later. "I am really enthusiastic at the idea of a Swedish girl. I adore Scandinavia, Archie. It always makes me think of Ibsen. Perhaps Gerda Lyberg—that's her name—will be as interesting as Hedda Gabler, and Mrs. Alving, and Nora, and all those lovely complex Ibsen creatures."

"They were Norwegians, dear," I said gently, anxious not to shatter illusions; "the Ibsen plays deal with Christiania, not with Stockholm."

"But they are so near," declared Letitia, amiable and seraphic once more. "Somehow or other, I invariably mix up Norway and Sweden and Denmark. I know I shall always look upon Gerda as an Ibsen girl, who has come here to 'live her life,' or 'work out her inheritance.' Perhaps, dear, she has some interesting internal disease, or a maggoty brain. Don't you think, Archie, that the Ibsen inheritances are always most fascinating? A bit morbid, but surely fascinating."

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"I prefer a healthy cook, Letitia," I said meditatively, "somebody willing to interest herself in our inheritance, rather than in her own."

"I don't mind what you say now," she pouted, "I am not to be put down by clamor. We really have a cook at last, and I feel more lenient toward you, Archie. Of course I was only joking when I suggested the Ibsen diseases. Gerda Lyberg may have inherited from her ancestors something quite nice and attractive."

"Then you mustn't look upon her as Ibsen, Letitia," I protested. "The Ibsen people never inherit nice things. Their ancestors always bequeath nasty ones. That is where their consistency comes in. They are receptacles for horrors. Personally, if you'll excuse my flippancy, I prefer Norwegian anchovies to Norwegian heroines. It is a mere matter of opinion."

"I'm ashamed of you," retorted Letitia defiantly. "You talk like some of the wretchedly frivolous criticisms, so called, that men like Acton Davies, and Alan Dale inflict upon the long-suffering public. They never amuse me. Ibsen may make his heroines the recipients of ugly legacies, but he has never yet cursed them with the odious incubus known as 'a sense of humor.' The people with a sense of humor have something in their brains worse than maggots. We'll

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drop the subject, Archie. I'm going to learn Swedish. Before Gerda Lyberg has been with us a month, I intend to be able to talk fluently. It will be most useful. Next time we go to Europe, we'll take in Sweden, and I'll do the piloting. I am going to buy some Swedish books, and study. Won't it be jolly? And just think how melancholy we were this morning, you and I, looking out of that window, and trying to materialize cooks. Wasn't it funny, Archie? What amusing experiences we shall be able to chronicle, later on!"

Letitia babbled on like half a dozen brooks, and thinking up a gentle parody, in the shape of, "cooks may come, and men may go," I decided to leave my household gods for the bread-earning contest downtown. I could not feel quite as sanguine as Letitia, who seemed to have forgotten the dismal results of the advertisement—just one little puny Swedish result. I should have preferred to make a choice. Letitia was as pleased with Gerda Lyberg as though she had been a selection instead of a that-or-nothing.

If somebody had dramatized Gerda Lyberg's initial dinner, it would probably have been considered exceedingly droll. As a serious episode, however, its humor, to my mind, lacked spontaneity. Letitia had asked her to cook us a little Swedish meal, so that we

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could get some idea of Stockholm life, in which, for some reason or other, we were supposed to be deeply interested. Unfortunately I was extremely hungry, and had carefully avoided luncheon in order to give my appetite a chance. We sat down to a huge bowl of cold greasy soup, in which enormous lumps of meat swam, as though, for their life, awaiting rescue at the prongs of a fork. In addition to this epicurean dish was a teeming plate of water-soaked potatoes, delicately boiled. That was all. Letitia said that it was Swedish, and the most annoying part of the entertainment was that I was alone in my critical disapprobation. Letitia was so engrossed with a little Swedish conversation book that she brought to table that she forgot the mere material question of food—forgot everything but the horrible jargon she was studying, and the soiled, wisp-like maiden, who looked more unlike a clean slate than ever.

“What shall I say to her, Archie?” asked Letitia, turning over the pages of her book, as I tried to rescue a block of meat from the cold fat in which it lurked. “Here is a chapter on dinner. ‘I am very hungry,’ ‘*Jag är myckel hungrig.*’ Rather pretty, isn’t it? Hark at this: ‘*Kypare gif mig matsedeln och vinlistan.*’ That means: ‘Waiter, give me the bill of fare, and the list of wines.’ ”

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"Don't," I cried; "don't. This woman doesn't know what dining means. Look out a chapter on feeding—or filling up."

Letitia was perfectly unruffled. She paid no attention to me whatsoever. She was fascinated with the slovenly girl, who stood around and gaped at her Swedish.

"Gerda," said Letitia, with her eyes on the book, "*Gif mir apven senap och nägra potäter.*" And then, as Miss Lyberg dived for the drowned potatoes, Letitia exclaimed in an ecstasy of joy, "She understands, Archie, she understands. I feel I am going to be a great success. *Jag tackar*, Gerda. That means 'I thank you,' *Jag tackar*. See if you can say it, Archie. Just try, dear, to oblige me. *Jag tackar*. Now, that's a good boy, *jag tackar*."

"I won't," I declared spitefully. "No *jag tackar*-ing for a parody like this, Letitia. You don't seem to realize that I'm hungry. Honestly, I prefer a delicatessen dinner to this."

"'Pray, give me a piece of venison,'" read Letitia, absolutely disregarding my mood. "'*Var god och gif mig ett stycke vildt.*' It is almost intelligible, isn't it dear? '*Ni äter icke*': you do not eat."

"I can't," I asserted mournfully, anxious to gain Letitia's sympathy.

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It was not forthcoming. Letitia's eyes were fastened on Gerda, and I could not help noting on the woman's face an expression of scorn. I felt certain of it. She appeared to regard my wife as a sort of irresponsible freak, and I was vexed to think that Letitia should make such an exhibition of herself, and countenance the alleged meal that was set before us.

"I have really dined very well," she continued joyously. "*Jag har verkligen atit mycket bra.*"

"If you are quite sure that she doesn't understand English, Letitia," I said viciously, "I'll say to you that this is a kind of joke I don't appreciate. I won't keep such a woman in the house. Let us put on our things and go out and have dinner. Better late than never."

Letitia was turning over the pages of her book, quite lost to her surroundings. As I concluded my remarks she looked up and exclaimed, "How very funny, Archie. Just as you said 'Better late than never,' I came across that very phrase in the list of Swedish proverbs. It must be telepathy, dear. 'Better late than never,' *Battre sent än aldrig.*' What were you saying on the subject, dear? Will you repeat it? And do try it in Swedish. Say '*Battre sent än aldrig*'."

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"Letitia," I shot forth in a fury, "I'm not in the humor for this sort of thing. I think this dinner, and this woman are rotten. See if you can find the word rotten in Swedish."

"I am surprised at you," Letitia declared glacially, roused from her book by my heroic though unparliamentary language. "Your expressions are neither English nor Swedish. Please don't use such gutter-words before a servant, to say nothing of your own wife."

"But she doesn't understand," I protested, glancing at Miss Lyberg. I could have sworn that I detected a gleam in the woman's eyes and that the sphinx-like attitude of dull incomprehensibility suggested a strenuous effort. "She doesn't understand anything. She doesn't want to understand."

"In a week from now," said Letitia, "she will understand everything perfectly, for I shall be able to talk with her. Oh, Archie, do be agreeable. Can't you see that I am having great fun? Don't be such a greedy boy. If you could only enter into the spirit of the thing, you wouldn't be so oppressed by the food question. Oh, dear! How important it does seem to be to men. Gerda, *hur gammal är ni?*"

The maiden sullenly left the room, and I felt con-

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vinced that Letitia had Swedishly asked her to do so. I was wrong. "*Hur gammal är ni?*" Letitia explained, simply meant, "How old are you?"

"She evidently didn't want to tell me," was my wife's comment, as we went to the drawing-room. "I imagine, dear, that she doesn't quite like the idea of my ferreting out Swedish so persistently. But I intend to persevere. The worst of conversation books is that one acquires a language in such a parrotty way. Now, in my book, the only answer to the question 'How old are you?' is, 'I was born on the tenth of August, 1852.' For the life of me, I couldn't vary that, and it would be most embarrassing. It would make me fifty-two. If any one asked me in Swedish how old I was, I should *have* to be fifty-two!"

"When I think of my five advertisements," I said lugubriously, as I threw myself into an arm-chair, fatigued at my efforts to discover dinner, "when I remember our expectation, and the pleasant anticipations of to-day, I feel very bitter, Letitia. Just to think that from it all nothing has resulted but that beastly mummy, that atrocious ossified thing."

"Archie, Archie!" said my wife warningly; "please be calm. Perhaps I was too engrossed with my studies to note the deficiencies of dinner. But do remember that I pleaded with her for a Swedish

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meal. The poor thing did what I asked her to do. Our dinner was evidently Swedish. It was not her fault that I asked for it. To-morrow, dear, it shall be different. We had better stick to the American régime. It is more satisfactory to you. At any rate, we have somebody in the house, and if our five advertisements had brought forth five hundred applicants we should only have kept one. So don't torture yourself, Archie. Try and imagine that we *had* five hundred applicants, and that we selected Gerda Lyberg."

"I can't, Letitia," I said sulkily, and I heaved a heavy sigh.

"Come," she said soothingly, "come and study Swedish with me. It will be most useful for your *Lives of Great Men*. You can read up the Swedes in the original. I'll entertain you with this book, and you'll forget all about Mrs. Potz—I mean Gerda Lyberg. By-the-by, Archie, she doesn't remind me so much of Hedda Gabler. I don't fancy that she is very subtile."

"You, Letitia," I retorted, "remind me of Mrs. Nickleby. You ramble on so."

Letitia looked offended. She always declared that Dickens "got on her nerves." She was one of the new-fashioned readers who have learned to despise Dick-

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ens. Personally, I regretted only his nauseating sense of humor. Letitia placed a cushion behind my head, smoothed my forehead, kissed me, made her peace, and settled down by my side. Lack of nourishment made me drowsy, and Letitia's babblings sounded vague and muffled.

"It is a most inclusive little book," she said, "and if I can succeed in memorizing it all I shall be quite at home with the language. In fact, dear, I think I shall always keep Swedish cooks. Hark at this: 'If the wind be favorable, we shall be at Gothenburg in forty hours.' '*Om vinden är god, sa äro vi pa pyrtiotimmar i Goteborg.*' I think it is sweetly pretty. 'You are seasick.' 'Steward, bring me a glass of brandy and water.' 'We are now entering the harbor.' 'We are now anchoring.' 'Your passports, gentlemen.' "

A comfortable lethargy was stealing o'er me. Letitia took a pencil and paper, and made notes as she plied the book. "A chapter on 'seeing a town' is most interesting, Archie. Of course, it must be a Swedish town. 'Do you know the two private galleries of Mr. Smith, the merchant, and Mr. Muller, the chancellor?' 'To-morrow morning, I wish to see all the public buildings and statues.' '*Statyerna*' is Swedish for statues, Archie. Are you listening, dear? 'We will

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visit the Church of the Holy Ghost, at two, then we will make an excursion on Lake Mälaren and see the fortress of Vaxholm.' It *is* a charming little book. Don't you think that it is a great improvement on the old Ollendorff system? I don't find nonsensical sentences like 'The hat of my aunt's sister is blue, but the nose of my brother-in-law's sister-in-law is red.'

I rose and stretched myself. Letitia was still plunged in the irritating guide to Sweden, where I vowed I would never go. Nothing on earth should ever induce me to visit Sweden. If it came to a choice between Hoboken and Stockholm, I mentally determined to select the former. As I paced the room, I heard a curious splashing noise in the kitchen. Letitia's studies must have dulled her ears. She was evidently too deeply engrossed.

I strolled nonchalantly into the hall, and proceeded deliberately toward the kitchen. The thick carpet deadened my footsteps. The splashing noise grew louder. The kitchen door was closed. I gently opened it. As I did so, a wild scream rent the air. There stood Gerda Lyberg in—in—my pen declines to write it—a simple unsophisticated birthday dress, taking an ingenuous reluctant bath in the "stationary tubs," with the plates, and dishes, and dinner things grouped artistically around her!

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The instant she saw me, she modestly seized a dish-towel, and shouted at the top of her voice. The kitchen was filled with the steam from the hot water. 'Venus arising' looked nebulous, and mystic. I beat a hasty retreat, aghast at the revelation, and almost fell against Letitia, who, dropping her conversation book, came to see what had happened.

"She's bathing!" I gasped, "in the kitchen—among the plates—near the soup—"

"Never!" cried Letitia. Then, melodramatically: "Let me pass. Stand aside, Archie. I'll go and see. Perhaps—perhaps—you had better come with me."

"Letitia," I gurgled, "I'm shocked! She has nothing on but a dish-towel."

Letitia paused irresolutely for a second, and going into the kitchen shut the door. The splashing noise ceased. I heard the sound of voices, or rather of a voice—Letitia's! Evidently she had forgotten Swedish, and such remarks as "If the wind be favorable, we shall be at Gothenburg in forty hours." I listened attentively, and could not even hear her say "We will visit the Church of the Holy Ghost at two." It is strange how the stress of circumstances alters the complexion of a conversation book! All the evening she had studied Swedish, and yet suddenly confronted by a Swedish lady bathing in our kitchen, dish-toweled

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but unashamed, all she could find to say was "How disgusting!" and "How disgraceful!" in English!

"You see," said Letitia, when she emerged, "she is just a simple peasant girl, and only needs to be told. It is very horrid, of course."

"And unappetizing!" I chimed in.

"Of course—certainly unappetizing. I couldn't think of anything Swedish to say, but I said several things in English. She was dreadfully sorry that you had seen her, and never contemplated such a possibility. After all, Archie, bathing is not a crime."

"And we were hunting for a clean slate," I suggested satirically. "Do you think, Letitia, that she also takes a cold bath in the morning, among the bacon and eggs, and things?"

"That is enough," said Letitia sternly. "The episode need not serve as an excuse for indelicacy."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was with the advent of Gerda Lyberg that we became absolutely certain, beyond the peradventure of any doubt, that there was such a thing as the servant question. The knowledge had been gradually wafted in upon us, but it was not until the lady from Stockholm had definitively planted herself in our midst, that we admitted to ourselves openly, unhesitatingly, unblushingly, that the problem existed. Gerda blazoned forth the enigma in all its force and defiance.

The remarkable thing about our latest acquisition was the singularly blank state of her gastronomic mind. There was nothing that she knew. Most women, and a great many men, intuitively recognize the physical fact that water, at a certain temperature, boils. Miss Lyberg, apparently seeking to earn her living in the kitchen, had no certain views as to when the boiling point was reached. Rumors seemed to have vaguely reached her that things called eggs dropped into water, would, in the course of time—any time, and generally less than a week—become

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eatable. Letitia bought a little egg-boiler for her—one of those antique arrangements in which the sands of time play to the soft-boiled egg. The maiden promptly boiled it with the eggs, and undoubtedly thought that the hen, in a moment of perturbation, or aberration, had laid it. I say "thought" because it is the only term I can use. It is, perhaps, inappropriate in connection with Gerda.

Potatoes, subjected to the action of hot water, grow soft. She was certain of that. Whether she tested them with the poker, or with her hands or feet, we never knew. I inclined to the last suggestion. The situation was quite marvelous. Here was an alleged worker, in a particular field, asking the wages of skilled labor, and densely ignorant of every detail connected with her task. It seemed unique. Carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers, seamstresses, dressmakers, laundresses—all the sowers and reapers in the little garden of our daily needs, were forced by the inexorable law of competition to possess some inkling of the significance of their undertakings. With the cook, it was different. She could step jubilantly into any kitchen without the slightest idea of what she was expected to do there. If she knew that water was wet and that fire was hot, she felt amply primed to demand a salary.

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Impelled by her craving for Swedish literature, Letitia struggled with Miss Lyberg. Compared with the Swede, my exquisitely ignorant wife was a culinary queen. She was an epicurean caterer. Letitia's slate-pencil coffee was ambrosia for the gods, sweetest nectar, by the side of the dishwater that cook prepared. I began to feel quite proud of her. She grew to be an adept in the art of boiling water. If we could have lived on that fluid, everything would have moved clockworkily.

"I've discovered one thing," said Letitia on the evening of the third day. "The girl is just a peasant, probably a worker in the fields. That is why she is so ignorant."

I thought this reasoning foolish. "Even peasants eat, my dear," I muttered. "She must have seen somebody cook something. Field-workers have good appetites. If this woman ever ate, what did she eat and why can't we have the same? We have asked her for no luxuries. We have arrived at the stage, my poor girl, when all we need is, prosaically, to 'fill up.' You have given her opportunities to offer us samples of peasant food. The result has been *nil*."

"It is odd," Letitia declared, a wrinkle of perplexity appearing in the smooth surface of her forehead.

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"Of course, she says she doesn't understand me. And yet, Archie, I have talked to her in pure Swedish."

"I suppose you said, 'Pray give me a piece of venison,' from the conversation book."

"Don't be ridiculous, Archie. I know the Swedish for cauliflower, green peas, spinach, a leg of mutton, mustard, roast meat, soup, and—"

"If the wind be favorable, we shall be at Gothenburg in forty hours," I interrupted. She was silent, and I went on: "It seems a pity to end your studies in Swedish, Letitia, but fascinating though they be, they do not really necessitate our keeping this barbarian. You can always pursue them, and exercise on me. I don't mind. Even with an American cook, if such a being exist, you could still continue to ask for venison steak in Swedish, and to look forward to arriving at Gothenburg in forty hours."

Letitia declined to argue. My mood was that known as cranky. We were in the drawing-room, after what we were compelled to call dinner. It had consisted of steak, burned to cinders, potatoes soaked to a pulp, and a rice pudding that looked like a poultice the morning after, and possibly tasted like one. Letitia had been shopping, and was therefore unable to supervise. Our delicate repast was capped by

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"black" coffee of an indefinite straw-color, and with globules of grease on the surface. People who can feel elated with the joy of living, after a dinner of this description, are assuredly both mentally and morally lacking. Men and women there are who will say: "Oh, give me anything. I'm not particular—so long as it is plain and wholesome." I've met many of these people. My experience of them is that they are the greatest gluttons on earth, with veritably voracious appetites, and that the best isn't good enough for them. To be sure, at a pinch, they will demolish a score of potatoes, if there be nothing else; but offer them caviare, canvas-back duck, quail, and nesselrode pudding, and they will look askance at food that is plain and wholesome. The "plain and wholesome" liver is a snare and a delusion, like the "bluff and genial" visitor whose geniality veils all sorts of satire and merciless comment.

Letitia and I both felt weak and miserable. We had made up our minds not to dine out. We were resolved to keep the home up, even if, in return, the home kept us down. Give in, we wouldn't. Our fighting blood was up. We firmly determined not to degenerate into that clammy American institution, the boarding-house feeder and the restaurant diner. We

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knew the type; in the feminine, it sits at table with its bonnet on, and a sullen gnawing expression of animal hunger; in the masculine, it puts its own knife in the butter, and uses a toothpick. No cook—no lack of cook—should drive us to these abysmal depths.

Letitia made no feint at Ovid. I simply declined to breathe the breath of *The Lives of Great Men*. She read a sweet little classic called "The Table; How to Buy Food, How to Cook It, and How to Serve It," by Alessandro Filippini—a delightful *table-d'hôte-y* name. I lay back in my chair and frowned, waiting until Letitia chose to break the silence. As she was a most chattily inclined person on all occasions, I reasoned that I should not have to wait long. I was right.

"Archie," said she, "according to this book, there is no place in the civilized world that contains so large a number of so-called high-livers, as New York City, which was educated by the famous Delmonico and his able lieutenants."

"Great Heaven!" I exclaimed with a groan, "why rub it in, Letitia? I should also say that no city in the world contained so large a number of low-livers."

"'Westward the course of Empire sways,'" she read, "'and the great glory of the past has departed

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from those centers where the culinary art at one time defied all rivals. The scepter of supremacy has passed into the hands of the metropolis of the New World?"

"What sickening cant!" I cried. "What fiendishly exaggerated restaurant talk! There are perhaps fifty fine restaurants in New York. In Paris, there are five hundred finer. Here we have places to eat in; there, they have artistic resorts to dine in. One can dine anywhere in Paris. In New York, save for those fifty fine restaurants, one feeds. Don't read any more of your cook-book to me, my girl. It is written to catch the American trade, with the subtle pen of flattery."

"Try and be patriotic, dear," she said soothingly. "Of course, I know you wouldn't allow a Frenchman to say all that, and that you are just talking cussedly with your own wife."

A ring at the bell caused a diversion. We hailed it. We were in the humor to hail anything. The domestic hearth *was* most trying. We were bored to death. I sprang up and ran to the door, a little pastime to which I was growing accustomed. Three tittering young women, each wearing a hat in which roses, violets, poppies, cornflowers, forget-me-nots, feathers and ribbons ran riot, confronted me.

"Miss Gerda Lyberg?" said the foremost, who wore

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a bright red gown, and from whose hat six spiteful poppies lurched forward and almost hit me in the face.

For a moment, dazed from the cook-book, I was nonplussed. All I could say was "No," meaning that I wasn't Miss Gerda Lyberg. I felt so sure that I wasn't, that I was about to close the door.

"She lives here, I believe," asserted the damsel, again shooting forth the poppies.

I came to myself with an effort. "She is the—the cook," I muttered weakly.

"We are her friends," quoth the damsel, an indignant inflection in her voice. "Kindly let us in. We've come to the Thursday sociable."

The three bedizened ladies entered without further parley and went toward the kitchen, instinctively recognizing its direction. I was amazed. I heard a noisy greeting, a peal of laughter, a confusion of tongues, and then—I groped my way back to Letitia.

"They've come to the Thursday sociable!" I cried, and sank into a chair.

"Who?" she asked in astonishment, and I imparted to her the full extent of my knowledge. Letitia took it very nicely. She had always heard, she said, in fact Mrs. Archer had told her, that Thursday nights were festival occasions with the Swedes. She thought

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it rather a pleasant and convivial notion. Servants must enjoy themselves, after all. Better a happy gathering of girls than a rowdy collection of men. Letitia thought the idea felicitous. She had no objections to giving privileges to a cook. Nor had I, for the matter of that. I ventured to remark, however, that Gerda didn't seem to be a cook.

"Then let us call her a 'girl,'" said Letitia, irritated at last.

"Gerda is a girl, only because she isn't a boy," I remarked tauntingly. "If by 'girl' you even mean servant, then Gerda isn't a girl. Goodness knows what she is. Hello! Another ring!"

This time, Miss Lyberg herself went to the door, and we listened. More arrivals for the sociable; four Swedish guests, all equally gaily attired in flower hats. Some of them wore bangles, the noise of which, in the hall, sounded like an infuriation of sleigh-bells. They were Christina and Sophie and Sadie and Alexandra—as we soon learned. It was wonderful how welcome Gerda made them, and how quickly they were "at home." They rustled through the halls, chatting and laughing and humming. Such merry girls! Such light-hearted little charmers! Letitia stood looking at them through the crack of the drawing-room door.

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Perhaps it was just as well that somebody should have a good time in our house.

"Just the same, Letitia," I observed, galled, "I think I should say to-morrow that this invasion is most impertinent—most uncalled for."

"Yes, Archie," said Letitia demurely, "you think you should say it. But please don't think *I* shall, for I assure you that I shan't. I suppose that we must discharge her. She can't do anything and she doesn't want to learn. I don't blame her. She can always get the wages she asks, by doing nothing. You would pursue a similar policy, Archie, if it were possible. Everybody would. But all other laborers must know how to labor."

I was glad to hear Letitia echoing my sentiments. She was quite unconsciously plagiarizing. Once again, she took up the cook-book. The sound of merrymaking in the kitchen drifted in upon us. From what we could gather, Gerda seemed to be "dressing up" for the delectation of her guests. Shrieks of laughter and clapping of hands made us wince. My nerves were on edge. Had any one at that moment dared to suggest that there was even a suspicion of humor in these proceedings, I should have slain him without compunction. Letitia was less irate and tried to comfort me.

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"You've no idea what hundreds of ways there are of cooking eggs, Archie," she said. "Do listen to me, dear. I'm trying so hard to be domesticated, and I do so want to please you. Don't let cook come between us. Here's a recipe for eggs *à la reine* that reads most charmingly. Are you listening, Archie?"

Letitia came over to me, and kissed me, and smoothed my hair, and apologized, and asked me to help her with her cook-book—and I was pacified. At another time, I should not have allowed her to apologize. But as there were eight obstreperous women in our kitchen and Letitia didn't object—well, I thought the apology was not out of place.

"How to make eggs *à la reine*," read Letitia lightly. "You prepare twelve eggs as for the above."

"What's 'as for the above'?" I asked.

"Let me see. Ah, yes. 'As for the above' means as for eggs *à la Meyerbeer*. To make eggs *à la reine*, you prepare twelve eggs as though for eggs '*à la Meyerbeer*'. It's simple."

"But we don't know how to make eggs '*à la Meyerbeer*'," I protested, thinking of the *pons asinorum* in Euclid that had caused me bitter anguish.

"To make eggs '*à la Meyerbeer*'," read Letitia, "you butter a silver dish, and break into it twelve fresh eggs—"

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"Twelve!" I cried. "My dear, we should be ill. We should die of biliousness. Six eggs apiece?"

"Twelve *fresh* eggs, Archie. I'm giving you Filippini's recipe. You break the eggs into a silver dish, and cook them on the stove for two minutes. Then cut six mutton kidneys in halves—"

"Six kidneys and twelve eggs?" I exclaimed. "Surely this is a recipe for—for—horses."

"We are not obliged to eat it all at once, silly! After cutting the mutton kidneys in halves, you broil or stew them according to taste, then add them to the eggs and serve with half a pint of hot *Perigueux sauce*, thrown over."

"What's *Perigueux sauce*?"

"See No. 191," continued Letitia, in a somewhat stupefied tone. "How confusing! No. 191. Here it is. *Perigueux sauce*: Chop up very fine two truffles. Place them in a sautoire with a glass of Madeira wine. Reduce on the hot stove for five minutes. Add half a pint of *Espagnole sauce*. For *Espagnole sauce*, see No. 151."

"What a labyrinth!" I said, feeling quite muddled; "it's like following a maze. We may as well see the thing through. What does No. 151 say?"

"No. 151. *Sauce Espagnole*. Mix one pint of raw, strong, mirepoix—"

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"Raw, strong what?"

"Raw, strong mirepoix—oh, Archie, see No. 138. In one minute I shall forget what we really wanted to make. Isn't it positively bewildering? See No. 138. Stew in a saucepan two ounces of fat, two carrots, one onion, one sprig of thyme, one bay leaf, six whole peppers, three cloves, and, if handy, a hambone cut into pieces. Add two sprigs of celery, and half a bunch of parsley roots, cook for fifteen minutes."

"And then—what do you get?" I asked putting my hands to my fevered brow.

"That's for the mirepoix," she replied; "and the mirepoix is for the *Espagnole sauce*. You mix one pint of raw strong mirepoix with five ounces of good fat (chicken's fat is preferable). Mix with the compound four ounces of flour, and moisten with one gallon of white broth. See No. 99."

"Heavens! Can't they bring it to a head? The twelve eggs and the six kidneys are waiting, Letitia."

"It *is* most exasperating, but we won't be worsted, Archie. See No. 99. White broth. There's half a page about it. I—I really don't believe that this flat is large enough to hold all the ingredients for this dish. You place in a large stock-urn, on a moderate fire, a good heavy knuckle of fine white veal with all the *débris*, or scraps of meat, cover fully with water,

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add salt, carrots, turnips, onions, parsley, leeks, celery. Boil six hours—”

“What—what are we trying to make?” I asked helplessly.

Letitia was equally dismayed. “I declare I almost forget. Let me see: The white broth was to be mixed with the mirepoix; the mirepoix was for the *sauce Espagnole*; the *sauce Espagnole* was for the *Perigueux sauce*; the *Perigueux sauce* was for the eggs à la Meyerbeer. We know that, don’t we? Well, for eggs à la reine. At present we know how to make eggs à la Meyerbeer. To cook eggs à la reine, you proceed as for eggs à la Meyerbeer, and then—”

“I don’t think we’ll have any, Letitia,” I ventured. “Really, I believe I can do without them. Anyway, they would be rather indigestible.”

“Well, I will know the end,” she declared pluckily. “I hate to be beaten. We know how to make eggs à la Meyerbeer. We know that, don’t we? Well, for the eggs à la reine, you make a garnishing of one ounce of cooked chicken breast, one finely-shred, medium-sized truffle, and six minced mushrooms. You moisten with half a pint of good *Allemande sauce*, see No. 210. No, I won’t see No. 210. You’re right, Archie. We’ll do without the eggs à la reine. This recipe is like the House That Jack Built, only much

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worse, for you have to 'see' things all the time. We'll have just plain, soft-boiled eggs."

"You might learn how to cook those, dear," I suggested timidly. "No, Letitia, don't be vexed. There must be an art in it. We've had four cooks, all unable to boil eggs. There must be a knack."

Letitia sighed, and shut up the cook-book. Eggs *à la reine* seemed as difficult as trigonometry, or conic sections, or differential calculus—and much more expensive. Certainly, the eight giggling cooks in the kitchen, now at the very height of their exhilaration, worried themselves little about such concoctions. My nerves again began to play pranks. The devilish pandemonium infuriated me. Letitia was tired and wanted to go to bed. I was tired and hungry and disillusioned. It was close upon midnight and the Swedish Thursday was about over. I thought it unwise to allow them even an initial minute of Friday. When the clock struck twelve, I marched majestically to the kitchen, threw open the door, revealed the octette in the enjoyment of a mound of ice-cream and a mountain of cake—that in my famished condition made my mouth water—and announced in a severe, yet subdued tone, that the revel must cease.

"You must go at once," I said, "I am going to shut up the house."

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Then I withdrew and waited. There was a delay, during which a Babel of tongues was let loose, and then Miss Lyberg's seven guests were heard noisily leaving the house. Two minutes later, there was a knock at our door and Miss Lyberg appeared, her eyes blazing, her face flushed and the expression of the hunted antelope defiantly asserting that it would never be brought to bay, on her perspiring features.

"You've insulted my guests!" she cried, in English as good as my own. "I've had to turn them out of the house, and I've had about enough of this place."

Letitia's face was a psychological study. Amazement, consternation, humiliation—all seemed determined to possess her. Here was the obtuse Swede, for whose dear sake she had dallied with the intricacies of the language of Stockholm, furiously familiar with admirable English! The dense, dumb Scandinavian—the lady of the "me no understand" rejoinder—apparently had the "gift of tongues." Letitia trembled. Rarely have I seen her so thoroughly perturbed. Yet seemingly she was unwilling to credit the testimony of her own ears, for with sudden energy, she confronted Miss Lyberg, and exclaimed imperiously, in Swedish that was either pure or impure: "*Tig-Ga din väg!*"

"Ah, come off!" cried the handmaiden insolently.

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"I understand English. I haven't been in this country fifteen years for nothing. It's just on account of folks like you that poor hard-working girls, who ain't allowed to take no baths or entertain no lady friends, have to protect themselves. Pretend not to understand them, says I. I've found it worked before this. If they think you don't understand 'em, they'll let you alone and stop worritting. It's like your impudence to turn my lady-friends out of this flat. It's like your impudence. I'll—"

Letitia's crestfallen look, following upon her perturbation, completely upset me. A wave of indignation swamped me. I advanced, and in another minute Miss Gerda Lyberg would have found herself in the hall, impelled there by a persuasive hand upon her shoulder. However, it was not to be.

"You just lay a hand on me," she said with cold deliberation, and a smile, "and I'll have you arrested for assault. Oh, I know the law. I haven't been in this country fifteen years for nothing. The law looks after poor weak, Swedish girls. Just push me out. It's all I ask. Just you push me out."

She edged up to me defiantly. My blood boiled. I would have mortgaged the prospects of my *Lives of Great Men* (not that they were worth mortgaging) for the exquisite satisfaction of confounding this

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abominable woman. Then I saw the peril of the situation: I thought of horrid headlines in the papers: "Author charged with abusing servant girl," or, "Arrest of Archibald Fairfax on serious charge," and my mood changed.

"I understood you all the time," continued Miss Lyberg insultingly. "I listened to you. I knew what you thought of me. Now I'm telling you what I think of you. The idea of turning out my lady-friends, on a Thursday night, too! And me a-slaving for them, and a-bathing for them, and a-treating them to ice-cream and cake, and in me own kitchen. You ain't no lady. As for you"—I seemed to be her particular pet—"when I sees a man around the house all the time, a-molly-coddling and a-fussing, I says to myself, he ain't much good if he can't trust the women folk alone."

We stood there like dummies, listening to the tirade. What could we do? To be sure, there were two of us, and we were in our own house. The antagonist, however, was a servant, not in her own house. The situation, for reasons that it is impossible to define, was hers. She knew it, too. We allowed her full sway, because we couldn't help it. The sympathy of the public, in case of violent measures, would not have been on our side. The poor domestic, oppressed and

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enslaved, would have appealed to any jury of married men, living luxuriously in cheap boarding-houses!

When she left us, as she did when she was completely ready to do so, Letitia began to cry. The sight of her tears unnerved me, and I checked a most unfeeling remark that I intended to make to the effect that, "if the wind be favorable, we shall be at Gothenburg in forty hours."

"It's not that I mind her insolence," she sobbed, "we were going to send her off anyway, weren't we? But it's so humiliating to be 'done.' We've been 'done.' Here have I been working hard at Swedish—writing exercises, learning verbs, studying proverbs—just to talk to a woman who speaks English as well as I do. It's—it's—so—so—mor—mortifying."

"Never mind, dear," I said, drying her eyes for her; "the Swedish will come in handy some day."

"No," she declared vehemently, "don't say that you'll take me to Sweden. I wouldn't go to the hateful country. It's a hideous language, anyway, isn't it, Archie? It is a nasty, laconic, ugly tongue. You heard me say *Tig* to her just now. *Tig* means 'be silent.' Could anything sound more repulsive? *Tig! Tig! Ugh!*"

Letitia stamped her foot. She was exceeding wroth.

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"Aunt Julia, and her clean slate!" she went on. "If this was a sample of a clean slate, give me one that has been scribbled all over. The annoying thing is that we have to stand still and listen to all this abuse. These women seem to hate one so! They are always on the defensive, when there is nothing to defend. They won't let you treat them nicely. Honestly, Archie, I think that they are all anarchists and that they hate us because we have a few dollars more than they have."

It was rather a grave assertion but I was not prepared to combat it. Could it be the fault of our "system"—admitting, for the sake of argument, that we have a system? Why did peasants, from the purlieus of foreign countries, undergo a "sea change" the instant they landed? Why did ladies who would have clamored to black your shoes in their own country, insist that you should black theirs when they came to yours? Why was it? What did it mean? Surely it was a problem, as knotty as that of the cooking of eggs *à la reine*. Still, undoubtedly, there are chefs who have succeeded in elaborating the eggs *à la reine*. Were there any people in this broad land, who, by dint of a life's persistence, had managed to understand their cook?

Letitia declined to talk any more. I could have

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harangued a mob. I could have stood on a wagon, without flags, and have incited the populace to deeds of violence. I should have loved to do it; I ached for the mere chance, and—and—

Well, I merely switched off the light.

CHAPTER XIV

Those who have followed me thus far through this sad, eventful history must have perceived that the little refinements of home life with which we had started to adorn our domestic hearth were being gradually starved to death. Yes, I know that many people will contemptuously allude to these "little refinements" as "little affectations." It all depends upon the point of view. I have been in towns where a man bold enough to wear a clean collar and a whole suit was disdainfully voted a dude; I have flitted through communities that would have derisively hooted at a silk hat. In western villages I have seen a gloved hand impertinently stared at, and have heard it discussed as a triumph of effeminacy—the sort of thing that might have caused the downfall of the Roman Empire. It all depends, assuredly, upon the point of view.

Our troubles were, of course, largely due to our bringing-up. We believed in the home, not as a mere place to sleep in, or a city-directory address for the reception of letters, but as the main feature of our

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life. We wanted to live there, entertain our friends there, and later on, perhaps, die there. The "bluff and genial" men will, of course, assert that I was a milksop, because I declined to sit around in shirt-sleeves, in the presence of my wife, and commune unaffectedly with the usual hand-painted cuspidor. The "bluff and genial" women will vote my poor Letitia airy because she didn't polish kitchen stoves, or hang out the very intimacies of her underwear on pulley lines. You see, we had always been lucky enough to find women willing to do these odd jobs for us. In business, a broker isn't considered a dude because he declines to be his own office-boy. He obtains the luxury of "help." His office-boy is perhaps an anarchist, but his wings are clipped and he receives no encouragement. Why is it that Letitia, perfectly willing to pay somebody to remove the rough edges from domestic existence, should be dubbed airy?

Certainly every well-regulated person with a home must rebel at the notion of opening the front door every time the bell rings. Surely each self-respecting man or women covets the privilege of being "out" to unwelcome visitors. The mere idea of being always "in" to every Tom, Dick and Harry, is loathsome. Yet that was our plight. If our bitterest enemy called, he would see us. The sweetest lie in the world is that

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told by the neat-handed Phyllis, when she pertly remarks "Not at home" to the unloved caller. That sweetest lie was an impossibility for poor Letitia and her husband.

And so it was on the evening of the second day after the departure of the *svensk* atrocity, Letitia came to me in the dining-room, as I smoked the pipe of alleged peace, in a most mysterious manner. She had a card in her hand, and her mood was—if I may say so—hectic.

"We shall have to see her, Archie," she said. "You see, I couldn't say I was out. She was very persistent, and pushed her way in. I was obliged to ask her into the drawing-room. She is"—reading the card—"Miss Priscilla Perfoozle."

"A cook!" I exclaimed joyously. "Oh, Letitia, I'm so glad!"

"No, Archie. She is Miss Priscilla Perfoozle, representing"—again reading the card—"the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Cooks of New York City."

I thought Letitia was joking—that, perchance, a horrible sense of humor was sprouting. We had dined out, most pleasantly, and were temporarily lulled into an agreeable lethargy of endurance. If this were a jest, it was certainly a very sorry one. I sprang up

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and looked at the card. There was no deception. It was, as Letitia said, the pasteboard of "Miss Priscilla Perfoozle, representing the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Cooks of New York City."

"What—impertinence!" I exclaimed, and the little dash between the two words signifies a profane expression that never before, during our short married life, had I been tempted to use.

Letitia flushed. "Don't, dear," she said. "We must see her. It can't do any harm, for we have nothing to do. And, Archie, *please* don't be rude, or impolite. Remember, I beg of you, that you are in your own house."

I always was when my system simply pined for a bit of impoliteness. Whenever I ached to be rude, I was reminded that I was at home. It was most exasperating. However, I promised Letitia that there should be no outbreak; that I would be as suave as I could, and that Miss Priscilla Perfoozle should escape with all her bones intact—and the sooner the better.

We found her seated by the tiger-head, over which I firmly believed and hoped that she had tripped, for she was rubbing her shin. She was a large, gaunt, yellow spinster, with a loose, flappy mouth, that looked as though it should have been buttoned up

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when she was not using it. She wore black silk, like the ruined ladies in melodrama, and a neat bonnet, fastened under her chin by velvet strings.

She rose, as we entered, and unchained a smile. It was one of those smiles that some Christians call loving. Her unbuttoned mouth—even a hook-and-eye on each lip would have been most serviceable—revealed a picturesque of the falsest sort of false teeth (this style ten dollars), but she was not a bit abashed. I felt perfectly convinced that she was determined to love us—that, even if we threw a vase at her, she would still consider us ineffably dear. She extended her hand to each of us—a hand in a black *glacé* kid glove that was too long for her fingers.

“Be seated,” said Letitia, with much unnecessary dignity.

“I dare say you have heard of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Cooks in New York City,” she began chastely; “you must have read of the good work it is doing in the interests of those poor, downtrodden girls who seek only to earn a living in the houses of the rich and prosperous. The good work the society is doing, Mrs. Fairfax—by-the-by, I obtained your name at Mrs. Greaseheaver’s intelligence office—is beyond all question. I am merely a missionary, aiming by means of heart-to-

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heart talks to awaken an interest, a human interest, in the sad lives of domestic servants, so that a few rays of sunlight may ultimately permeate their dull and wretched days."

Letitia looked pleadingly at me, as I moved uneasily. She laid her hand, as though unconsciously, upon an Indian paper-cutter in my vicinity. The edges were very sharp.

"My heart aches for them," continued Miss Perfoozle feelingly, "I might almost say that it bleeds. I listen to their stories day by day, in tears—positively tears, Mrs. Fairfax. It is perhaps silly of me to give way—I know I am a foolish little thing—but I can not help it. I am very, very susceptible. I am devoting my life to the glorious task of improving their state. By the distribution of tracts, we reach the poor girls themselves. They come to us; we board and bed them, and we endeavor to place them with ladies whose antecedents we have diligently investigated."

"You have an intelligence office, then?" asked Letitia naïvely.

"Ah, do not say it," implored Miss Perfoozle, with ten black *glacé* fingers outstretched like claws. "The term has passed into such disrepute, dear Mrs. Fairfax. Naturally our society has to be supported,

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though most of the ladies comprising its members would gladly give their little all to the beautiful cause. My little all, I frequently contribute."

"Then your society depends upon these little alls?" I asked, peacefully resolved to probe the Perfoozle as a pastime.

"It could not be," she replied piously. "We charge the girls we place a percentage of their first salary—merely a nominal percentage, dear Mrs. Fairfax. We seek to place them with reputable, God-fearing people—Christians preferred, though we have no rooted objections to Jews. Our society has decided that the question of domestic help *is* a question merely because most employers are cruel and abusive. Treat the employers and not the girls. That, dear Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax, is the motto of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Cooks in New York City."

Letitia withdrew her hand from the Indian paper-knife, after pushing it in my direction. I gleaned from that trifling fact that Letitia was quite willing to let me do my worst. Her face flushed as she listened to the dulcet utterances of the sweetly insolent Perfoozle.

"If I mistake not," continued the spinster, "you employed a worker calling herself Mrs. McCaffrey?"

Letitia started. I winced. Horrible memories

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surged within us. Old wounds re-ached. We did not answer.

"A most worthy person," resumed the Perfoozle serenely, "a beautiful character. A Christian. She came to us, Mrs. Fairfax, crushed. Her little girl—one of the sweetest little things I have met—contracted mumps, she tells me, owing to the unsanitary conditions of the house. I am not here to scold. I have no right to do so. But, frankly, I must admit that my warm sympathies were extended toward Mrs. McCaffrey. Do not be angry with me, Mrs. Fairfax. We are all human creatures, working in a common cause. You look good and kind, both of you, yet in the case of poor Birdie, will you let me say that I can not give you right? I dare not. Ah, my dear young people, why—why should you torture human souls? Think—think that you may meet your cooks in the after-life."

This was a horrid aspect of immortality that I had never contemplated. Letitia was smiling, almost as though she possessed a sense of humor. My wife's mood inspired me. We might probably dally with Priscilla Perfoozle for a half-hour or so.

"We hope to go to Heaven, Miss Perfoozle," I ventured, with a sacred intonation.

"I hope so, too, dear young people," she bleated.

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"In that case, we shall not meet our cooks," I continued. "All those we have had will most assuredly go to hell, as incompetent, abusive, mercenary, home-destroying, ignorant obstructions. You have no branches in—er—hell, Miss Perfoozle?"

I had mentally suggested dallying toyfully with Priscilla, for a half-hour or so. The gentle query anent Hades showed me instantly, however, that while Priscilla was a good many things, she was not a fool. Her eyes snapped at my remark, and one of them, that looked a trifle squinty, turned deliberately inward, and gave her a most sinister aspect. Piety was certainly hers, in a Pecksniffian sense, but the commercial instinct leavened the loaf. That she intended to be-cook us from her own larder, was manifest; that she wished to "investigate" us so that she could be certain of one month for her cook and its happy percentage for herself, was clear. There was method in the Perfoozle madness, and I resolved calmly, and unangrily, to "see it through."

"You are profane, Mr. Fairfax," she said with a sickly smile, "but I expect it. The laborers in humanity's vineyard have much to contend with. But we persevere. We are smitten on one cheek, but we cheerfully turn the other. Moreover, you do not mean to offend., I know it. I bear no malice. We will say

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no more about the poor widow, Mrs. McCaffrey, whom, by-the-by, I hav^e placed on Fifth Avenue, at a salary of forty dollars per month."

"I'm sorry for your percentage, Miss Perfoozle," remarked Letitia with glorious acidity. "You can see it, perhaps. I can't."

"You think—" began the spinster nervously, moved by the pecuniary insinuation.

"No," retorted Letitia. "I am sure."

Miss Perfoozle was silent for a moment, plunged in thought. Perhaps, like Mr. James Russell of variety renown, she thought she saw two dollars. However, although by no means naked, she was unashamed. She righted herself speedily. Piety was reinstated and she beamed upon us beatifully.

"Your troubles," she went on, "and I am right in assuming that you have them?—are not serious, my dear young people. They are the result of the ugly American habit of flouting inferiors. This is a democracy, yet the classes are too bitterly outlined. Some time ago, I visited a young couple in a walk of life more humble than yours. They had been unable to keep help. They were desperate. They talked of breaking up their home. I carefully investigated their case, and discovered that the evil was due to the fact that they had been taught to regard a cook as

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an inferior. I undertook to send them a young country girl, who was very anxious to study New York. My condition was that they treat her as an equal. At first they rebelled, but—they were desperate. They agreed. I sent them the girl—a sweet young woman, named Sybil Montmorency. They took to her at once. She sat at table with them; she went out with them; in the evenings, she read with them. They showed her the sights of New York—the Statue of Liberty, the Aquarium, the new Bridge. Sybil was delighted. She told me that she felt that she was merely a boarder—and was actually paid to board. She liked it immensely. She was as happy as a lark, until—”

“I suppose she needed a change of scene?” I suggested.

“Not at all,” viciously asserted the Perfoozle. “They broke their agreement—deliberately. It appears that they were very musical. They had subscribed for the series of Philharmonic concerts. Actually—would you believe it, Mrs. Fairfax?—they declined to live up to their word. They refused to take little Sybil, who was just as musical as they—precise-ly as musical. Naturally the poor child was incensed. There she was, compelled to sit at home, alone, while they were out enjoying themselves! Now,

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this is a democratic country—I am an American to the roots of my hair—and I admit that I was furious. I have blacklisted this couple. Never another girl shall they have from my establishment. I have Sybil on my hands. She is hard to place, for she is so pure and good."

"I suppose she is an excellent cook?" I asked demurely.

"I never permitted myself to ask her such a question," replied Miss Perfoozle. "In the case of some women, of course, such questions may be necessary. It would have been an impertinence in the instance of Miss Montmorency. Such a girl was an ornament to any home. I suppose she could cook. Anybody can. It is a detail. Of course, the case I have just mentioned is extreme. I do not insist upon terms of equality. The haughtiness of American women render equality impossible, just at present. Later on, perhaps, when the glorious spirit of democracy—the democracy of Jefferson—has really instilled itself into our institutions. But, I beg of you, Mrs. Fairfax, as you hope for domestic happiness, to try and avoid the use of that most pernicious word, servant. Ah, my blood boils at the word."

"You prefer help?" asked Letitia.

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"It is a nice point. Help has also become equally obnoxious. I call my girls house-mates, or domestic companions, or house-aids. Poor downtrodden women! They love to be called companions. Their hearts expand at the notion of companionship. Let me ask you one thing, Mrs. Fairfax." (She deliberately snubbed me.) "Have you ever sought to analyze the sensations of one of our dear sisters, when she goes out for the first time, to cook for strange people in a strange house, far away from her loved ones?"

"Well," said Letitia quite amiably, "I suppose that her sensations, if she doesn't know what cooking means, must be uncomfortable. She must feel, or should feel, that she is obtaining money under false pretenses. If she *can* cook, she is probably pleased at the notion of earning her own living."

"Ah, you are hard, hard!" groaned Perfoozle, wringing her *glacé* kids. "You are relentless. I am sorry I told you the story of Sybil Montmorency. But do not believe"—her commercial instinct apparently sat up and snorted—"that all my girls are similar. This case was unique, though I trust that in the years to come it will be quite ordinary, and every-day. What I am particularly anxious to tell you, for you

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are bound to be impressed by the fact, is that the authority of Pope Pius IX is exquisitely permeated through our scheme."

"Hasn't the Pope a cook?" I asked, wondering how he would like Mrs. Potzenheimer as an ornament to the Vatican—or gentle Gerda Lyberg.

"Ah, I beseech you, Mr. Fairfax!" cried Priscilla, her lips flapping. "The Pope has laid down certain rules to govern the Christian democracy. Thanks to a Paulist Father—who has one of our girls at thirty-two dollars a month (and she has already been there four days!)—I have been able to see those rules. The Holy Father says that it is an obligation for the rich and for those that own property, to succor the poor and the indigent, according to the precepts of the Gospel. They must not injure their savings by violence or fraud, nor expose them to corruption or danger of scandal, nor alienate them from the spirit of family life, nor impose on them labor beyond their strength or unsuitable to their age or sex—"

"Pardon me," I interrupted, "but what do you suppose the Pope would say if he found his cook taking a bath in the kitchen, among the dinner things?"

"You shock me!" cried Miss Perfoozle, with a little shriek. "You shock me, but—again I say—I do not mind. We missionaries must expect it. The Pope,

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dear brother Fairfax, would, I trust, never enter his kitchen. Therefore he could not perceive the eccentric case you suggest. If perchance, he did perceive it, he would say that cleanliness was next to godliness and godliness superior to dinner things. In addition to the Pope's words, which I learned by heart, I have the utterances of a famous diocesan director of charitable institutions. I have not memorized them, as, famous though the director be, he is not the Pope. I will read you what he says."

She drew from her pocket a soiled tract, and read:

" 'Anything that will tend to do away with the friction that is to be found so often to-day between the employer and the employed, is to be commended and assisted.' It is short, but pithy. Note that he says, 'anything'. You will also have observed that the word servant is never used."

"Do you remember a certain quotation from Bacon, Miss Perfoozle?" I queried, "that which says: 'Men in great place are thrice servants—servants of the sovereign, or state—servants of fame, and servants of business.' Must we alter all this? If so, we should also re-edit the Bible. Can your cooks bear to read the Bible? Can they condescend to consider themselves as servants, even of the Almighty?"

Miss Perfoozle looked frightened. She blanched

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—if such an expression can be used in connection with her yellow face. However, she rose to the occasion.

"You affect to misunderstand me," she said resignedly, "but I know that you are impressed in spite of yourself. It is difficult to plant the seed, but I feel that it is planted. 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap.' I shall expect to reap, dear young people. Ah, what a pretty home you have. This cunning little parlor is a veritable curiosity shop. It is full of pretty gewgaws." (She looked rather spitefully at the tiger-head.) "Such a tasteful little home! May I—may I, dear Mrs. Fairfax, take a peep at the room you give to the dear sister who is so willing and anxious to wait on you?"

Letitia was about to make an indignant remark. I saw it coming. Fortunately, Miss Perfoozle didn't appeal to me quite seriously.

"Leave her to me, Letitia," I whispered to my wife, as Priscilla's bonneted head was momentarily averted. Then to Miss Perfoozle: "Certainly, my dear mademoiselle," I said, "come this way, and be lenient with us. We try to do the best we can for our dear sisters."

I led her to our bedroom. It was a pretty room, small but natty. The brass bedstead was elaborate with onyx trimmings. There was a handsome, pale-

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blue satin eiderdown upon it. A large cheval-glass stood in the corner, beveled and glistening. The bureau was littered with dainty bits of silver—puff-boxes, manicure articles, hair-curlers, brushes, combs, jars, bottles, cases. There were two windows, from each of which trailed expensive curtains of Renaissance lace.

"This is cook's room," I said, biting my lips, while Letitia stuffed a small lace handkerchief into her mouth. "Of course, it is very small but—"

"It is charming," cried Miss Perfoozle ingenuously. "Positively, my dear Mrs. Fairfax, I shouldn't mind it in the least for myself. I believe—nay, I am sure—that I could put up with it."

"Oh, Miss Perfoozle!" I exclaimed deprecatingly, "how can you say such a thing? It is kind of you. You are trying to put us at our ease."

"Was this Mrs. McCaffrey's room?" she asked; a tinge of suspicion in her tone.

"Certainly," I cheerfully lied, "Birdie and her dear little child both slept here. My wife was so sorry that there wasn't a night-nursery for the little one. Yes, Miss Perfoozle, they both slept here, until the child contracted that horrid case of mumps."

"Ah, there is running water in the room," exclaimed Perfoozle, spotting the marble basin. "It is

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always unhealthy. I look upon it as distinctly unsanitary. Probably it accounts for the child's illness. There are exhalations of a miasmatic nature from these running water arrangements. Otherwise, Mrs. Fairfax, I have no fault to find with the room. It is appointed far better than is the custom."

"It is appointed far better than our own room, Miss Perfoozle," I declared, with assumed indignation. "Let me show you our apartment. It is plain, but—it does for us."

I impelled her gently toward the sanctum that Birdie and Potzenheimer and the others had veritably occupied. It had an ingrain carpet, and a bed, and a wash-stand. Miss Perfoozle surveyed it critically.

"Ah," she said, "you believe in keeping your own bedroom free from encumbrances. You are right. This is healthy. This is airy. I presume you realized the fact that cooks love ornaments and articles of virtue" (sic). "Unfortunately, they do. As they advance in education, this will not be the case. In the years to come, Mrs. Fairfax, a properly self-respecting cook will prefer a cool, unadorned sleeping apartment, like this, to the vulgarity and ostentation of what you now offer her. At present, however, my dear young people, I am bound to admit that you treat your cook as she expects to be treated. I am

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delighted. I shall not fail to express this sentiment to Mrs. McCaffrey when next I see her."

Letitia's shoulders were heaving. I nudged her, and whispered, "Don't, for goodness' sake." Miss Perfoozle used a lorgnette as she made her inspection, and peered into everything.

"This is the dining-room," I said, throwing open the door. "It is, as usual, small, but fairly large for the average apartment. There is room for cook, and five friends. We always dine out, you know. We dote on restaurants. My wife simply can't keep away from them. So we give over the dining-room to cook. We breakfast here, of course—just an egg, or so. There is electric light, which, though rather trying to the eyes, is convenient."

"It is a shame," said Miss Perfoozle magnanimously, "to find you without help. Honestly, it is a shame. You are young people, as I said before, and I believe, in spite of Mr. Fairfax's flippancy (perhaps he *has* had occasion to feel flippant) that you are inclined to do the fair thing to your house-mates. I know a girl who will suit you, I am perfectly sure."

"Miss Montmorency?" I ventured.

"No, not Sybil. Sybil demands absolute equality, and I can quite see that in your case, Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax, it would be impossible and perhaps"—in-

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dulgently—"unnecessary. But there is no reason why you should not be suited at once."

"I ought to say," I interrupted in a downcast voice, "that there is no accommodation for bicycles, while as for automobiles—"

"I do not countenance either," snapped Miss Perfoozle. "The former, which, I am thankful to say, have outlived their usefulness, were unfeminine. The latter, nasty, smelly things, always exploding and running over people, can be dispensed with. I can guarantee you a girl who will stay with you for a long time."

"A whole month?" I queried gaspingly.

Miss Perfoozle turned upon me suddenly. I had felt that she didn't quite appreciate me at my just worth. Something in my last gasp appealed to her unpleasantly.

"I trust you are not jesting," she remarked in a lemon tone.

"No," I said shortly, moving toward the front door, "I never jest. But you have come too late, Miss Perfoozle. We are breaking up housekeeping tomorrow and sail for Europe next day, to be gone for five years and three months. You might take our names for a cook in five years and three months from

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to-morrow. We shall visit London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Jersey City, Poughkeepsie, Schenectady—”

“You allowed me to waste my precious time here?” she asked in genuine, unadulterated anger. “You permitted me to devote an evening to the revelation of my plans and hopes, when you knew—you were sure—you—”

“We had nothing better to do, I assure you, dear Miss Perfoozle,” I said blithely. “You have amused us immensely. You must be going? Yet it is early. You *will* go? My dear madam, of course, we may not detain you. Will you take our best wishes to Birdie, and the child, and—”

Miss Perfoozle’s face was horrid to look at. Letitia turned from her in dismay and whispered a husky “Don’t!” in my ear. The black *glacé* hands looked like claws. The representative of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Cooks in New York City resembled a Fury, baffled. We opened the door and clicked her out. For the first time in many days we burst into a peal of laughter. We simply shook. We howled. Such a good time had, a few hours ago, seemed impossible.

“I believe you have a sense of humor, after all,

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Archie," said Letitia, drying the tears from her eyes and sinking into a chair.

"Not yet, Letitia, not yet," I demurred, weak from mirth, "but if this thing keeps up I'm awfully afraid that the dreadful curse will be visited on us both."

CHAPTER XV

And it came to pass, that behold! we broke bread, and ate, and for a few soft, silly weeks, lived, in what I might call a fool's paradise. As any paradise, however, is better than none at all, and too much purgatory is apt to lose the mulligatawniness of its flavor, this little breathing spell gave us a chance to recuperate, and, as the French put it, to recoil, in order to leap better.

It was like this. A lady friend of a cousin of an aunt of our laundress, knew somebody that was acquainted with a person, who had heard of a Finnish maiden anxious for a position. It was a bit roundabout, but not worse than the simple recipes in Alessandro Filippini's cook-book. Moreover, a Finnish maiden—or any maiden—was less of a luxury and more of a necessity than eggs *à la reine*. We therefore negotiated, with the felicitous result that one bright morning Letitia received a notification that the anxious Olga would wait upon her. We both of us read up Finland in the encyclopædia, it being one of those obscure European countries with which we

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were not familiar. Letitia thought it belonged to Scandinavia; I mixed it up with Lapland. We were able to settle the point to our mutual satisfaction before Olga arrived.

"I have a dreadful presentiment," observed Letitia, "that you will say 'I see her Finnish'! If you do, I could never endure her. I warn you, Archie."

"As though I should perpetrate such a knock-kneed pun!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Our experiences may have weakened me physically, but my intellect is still unimpaired."

Olga arrived in the early morn whilst I was shaving. Letitia interviewed her in the drawing-room, and I fondly hoped that my services would not be needed. These cook-dialogues told upon my peace of mind, and I was beginning to yearn for a chance to give myself, heart and soul, to my affairs. I had finished shaving, and was admiring the velvety skin that I had coaxed into prominence, when Letitia came bustling in, very serious and important.

"Before I quite settle with Olga," she said, "I should so like you just to take a look at her, Archie. Would you mind? At first sight I thought her repulsive, but after looking at her fixedly, for a long time, I discovered that she really had a kind face."

"I'll come in"—I sighed mournfully—"and inves-

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tigate. Of course, dear, good looks are not essential. She will not have to pose in the drawing-room. In fact, we really are not obliged to look at her at all. Personally, I think it would be soothing not to do so."

However, Letitia's views were not far-fetched. The Finnish lady was repellent enough to gaze upon. She wore a cape and a loose, dingy linsey-woolsey dress, and was so squat that her head looked like a knob, to be taken on and off. In fact, the head seemed out of place and unnecessary—almost as though she had borrowed somebody else's. She sat by the window, with her hands folded upon her lap, and appeared to be "taking solid comfort," as the saying is.

For one moment a strange idea—but no, I banished it immediately as preposterous. Irrelevant though it may seem, perhaps this is the place in which the reader might advantageously learn our ages. I have tried to conceal them, hitherto, but youth—like murder—must out. I was twenty-five; Letitia nineteen. These little details need not be mentioned again. Their somewhat brusque interpolation at this late stage seems necessary for a proper comprehension of what is to follow.

"You don't think she is too frightful?" whispered

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Letitia, as my eyes were riveted upon the figure-less figure. "Do, please, look at her face."

The face was rosy and amiable. It was not necessary to look very fixedly at her to discover that. It was a vast improvement upon the acidulated countenance of the late Miss Lyberg. I wondered if the strange idea that I had banished so promptly could, by any chance, have occurred to Letitia. I made a mental vow—a resolute inward swear—not to ask her.

"In this case, her face is her fortune," I said, taking Letitia aside; "it is—quite a face. A smile, occasionally, will help us along, Letitia. This girl certainly looks as though she didn't hate us, just at present. It will be quite a treat not to be hated. I should engage her if I were you, and trust to luck. It is a good sign that we are not instantly attracted toward her. Perhaps it is a happy augury."

Olga Allallami—for such was her title—was there-upon secured. She seemed pleased, even grateful, which impressed me as being so drollly unusual, that I was almost suspicious. Cooks would make a cynic of the Angel Gabriel,—though I have no intention of comparing myself to that seraph.

"These Finnish girls," explained Letitia (I had asked for no explanation), "are brought up out of doors. They live a very active life in their own coun-

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try in the fields. They are lithe and agile. When they come here, poor things, and undertake sedentary pursuits, the change is bound to tell upon them. Their sinuous figures disappear ; they grow squat and stumpy ; instead of the lissome, flexible girl, they develop into the heavy, inactive matron. That's it, of course."

Letitia appeared to be pursuing her thoughts aloud —for her own benefit, and perhaps for mine. It seemed to be a reasonable way of looking at Miss Allallami. In any case, a beautiful cook was unnecessary. Nor did it seem possible to find one. All the beautiful cooks were on the stage—in the chorus, where the remuneration was larger, if less certain, and the life more glittering, if less healthy. The beautiful cooks were all singing "tra la la" in comic opera, and were not worrying themselves about "refined Christian homes" in upper New York.

Miss Allallami came to her kitchen with dazzling punctuality next day, and almost before we knew it, the riot of our life was quelled, and an almost ominous tranquillity settled upon us. For once, we seemed to have done the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. Our Olga proved to be most affable. She spoke English fairly well and delighted to understand us. Her cooking, while not precisely Lucullian,

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was the best we had known, so far. She thoroughly understood the art of boiling water, and upon that ground-work built up a satisfactory culinary knack. She was prompt and willing; she was desirous of pleasing.

In a neat white apron, she looked far less objectionable. In fact, within a few days after her arrival, we neither of us noticed her physical uncomeliness. Either we grew accustomed to it, or we had magnified it in the first instance. Letitia, always enthusiastically inclined, declared that she thought Olga perfectly sweet, which seemed a bit exaggerated to my less exuberant moods. Yet I was bound to admit that she had a nice face, a comfortable way of looking at one, and a comforting manner. There was no suggestion of anarchy in anything that she did. She never went out. The height of her enjoyment appeared to be reached when she sat down. She loved to sit down. When her day's work was done, she sat and sewed, which seemed so respectable! Our other handmaidens—so Letitia told me—never sewed. They pinned things on. As long as they could get pins they paid no attention to needles.

"She makes such cute, needlework-y things!" said Letitia gushingly, one day, "dear little dresses and caps. I fancy, Archie, that she must be working for

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a store. It really does seem, dear, as though we had a treasure, at last. And just to think how doubtful we were about her. You were right; it *was* a good sign that we were not instantly attracted."

Miss Allallami fitted into the household scheme admirably. She was always ready to efface herself, and in fact seemed to prefer it. Gradually, Letitia and I grew quite light-hearted. We began to go about and see people. We called, and emerged from our husk, so to speak. Meals were always ready for us, and the hot dishes were not cold nor the cold dishes hot. System was introduced into our midst, and Olga —well, I would have doubled her wages gladly.

Several weeks passed, and the bolt had not fallen from the blue. We went to Tarrytown, and visited Aunt Julia, who rejoiced with us in our find. The old lady was elated at our happiness, but knew that things would right themselves eventually. She said something about a long lane that had no turning. I fancied that I had heard it before. When we returned, Letitia plunged into the classics once again, and good old Ovid was trotted out, refreshed after his vacation. I set to work, and added chapters to my *Lives of Great Men*. At the office, I labored with renewed vigor, and Tamworth asserted that I must have taken a new lease of life. He was very complimentary,

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was Tamworth, and it was the invitation I tendered him to dine with us—which he promptly accepted—that ousted me from the sweet security in which I seemed to have been lulled.

He came to dinner—and a very good dinner we had. It was neatly served by Olga, who, with her face all smiles, appeared almost to coax us to eat. I laughingly asked Tamworth if he recalled a former dinner with us, for at present I felt far superior to that uncanny day. Yes, he remembered it, and was quite amused. I noticed that he watched Olga very closely—with almost embarrassing attention, but I ascribed this to his interest in her truly respectable dinner, a dinner, by-the-by, that had no premonitory menu cards. We had grown out of that sort of thing, and out of others. Letitia no longer appeared *décolletée*, although I still wore evening clothes.

After dinner, when Letitia had left us to our cigars, Tamworth struck a match, and, pausing before he lighted his weed, looked at me with a puzzled manner.

“I’m surprised at you, Fairfax,” he said. “Of course she is a good cook. There is no doubt about that. But do you think it quite nice, or—advisable?”

“What—what do you mean?”

“Well,” he said nervously, “it seems a pity that

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the woman shouldn't stay at home with her husband, or—if she is a widow, with her people."

"My dear Tamworth," I remarked laughing, "you are a humorist. Why, she has never even told us that she is married. I'm quite sure she isn't."

"Oh, I hope she is," he cried, "I hope for Mrs. Fairfax's sake that she is. Say, old man, you certainly don't want this sort of thing. I am sure it is very charitable of you—and all that. It is very sweet and womanly of Mrs. Fairfax. But the other people in the house must talk."

At first I thought the man had gone stark, staring mad. He had taken very little wine at dinner, so it couldn't possibly be that. I looked at him in amazement.

"You don't mean to tell me," he went on, "that you're blind?"

Then he said some things, in a low tone, that I—I really can't write. They were horrible. They sent the blood rushing to my face. They impelled me back to the day we engaged Olga, when a strange idea had occurred to me, that I had banished instantly. So thoroughly had I banished it, that it had never occurred again, and came to me now as a sheer and odious novelty. Tamworth could have no object

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in making these suggestions to me. He was undoubtedly in earnest. Yet it seemed so ridiculous and so lacking in—er—etiquette. Olga was such a pleasant, good-natured person. Still, I was bound to admit that even pleasant, good-natured persons—

I rose, and began to walk up and down, mentally cursing my guest. In return for bread, he had made me uncomfortable. It was quite a ticklish position in which I found myself. The question must be discussed with Letitia, and—Quixotic, or some other “otic,” though it may sound—the notion of such a discussion was most distasteful to me. Aunt Julia would have called me an idiot; perhaps I *was* an idiot; still, because a pretty girl happens to be a man’s wife, it does seem distressing that he should moot topics with her, that, if she were somebody else’s wife, would remain unmooted.

Tamworth said no more on the subject; he evidently considered that he had done his duty, and had no further mission to fulfil. When we joined Letitia in the drawing-room, Tamworth and my wife monopolized the conversation. I could not take part in it; I felt too oppressed by the sudden apparition of the serpent that had appeared in our Eden. Letitia tried to include me in the small-talk, but she did not succeed. I sat, plunged in thought, dreading to think

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of Tamworth's departure, when I felt that I should be forced to disconcert Letitia. And she had been so happy for a few weeks, poor girl! Possibly, Tamworth was what they call an "alarmist." I could guarantee him no more dinners in my house.

At last he went, and we were alone. I made up my mind, while he was putting on his bonnet and shawl outside, that I would defer my discussion with Letitia until the morning. It would come better at the boiled-egg moment, when we were quite calm and dispassionate. Moreover, I could brood over it all night, and wisdom might come to me in that way.

"How quiet you were, Archie," said Letitia, "and what a time you and Mr. Tamworth were over your cigars! What *were* you talking about?"

I made a bold stroke. "Tamworth," I replied in solemn, funereal tones, "was talking about Olga."

"The dinner certainly was excellent," said Letitia proudly, "and I'm glad we invited him. So he talked about Olga? I noticed, Archie, that he was staring at her, in really a rude way, while we were dining. I couldn't help thinking that perhaps Mr. Tamworth is a—flirt!"

What a tonic a laugh is! Letitia's little suggestion appealed to me as so inordinately funny—despite my absence of a sense of humor—that I fell back in

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my chair, convulsed. I laughed until the tears rolled down my cheeks. I had not made so merry since the visit of Miss Priscilla Perfoozle. I couldn't help picturing Tamworth's face, on learning that my wife had suggested the idea of his flirting with the winsome Miss Allallami. It did me good. I felt better immediately. The sinister aspect of things seemed less alarming.

"I don't see the joke," said Letitia. "If you are amused because you look upon Olga as too plain to be flirted with—well, all I can say is that every eye formeth its own beauty. Mr. Tamworth is seemingly very sedate, but still waters run deep. Really, Archie,"—as I continued to shake,—"I think you are very rude. Nothing annoys me more than to be laughed at."

The psychological moment had apparently arrived. There was no need to wait for the breakfast hour. After having laughed myself strong, I felt primed for the unpleasant task. Poor little ingenuous Letitia! I dubbed myself a mean, sneaking sort of a Satan!

"Letitia," I began, "I have something to say to you."

This sounded suspiciously like Mr. William Collier, at Weber and Fields', and I realized it as soon as I

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had spoken. It was a bad beginning. Letitia anticipated a jest, for she followed up my remark with "Don't tell me that you are—going—away—from—here?"

"My dear," I said lugubriously, "Arthur Tamworth says that Olga must be married."

Letitia looked surprised and a bit scornful. "And yet they say that women are gossips, and that men are superior!" she observed sententiously. "If that isn't a confession of utter weakness! Two men, after dinner, with cigars and *liqueurs*, can find nothing better to talk about than the love affairs of the cook! It is my turn to laugh now. Excuse me."

I gladly allowed her to laugh, as I thought it would do her good. It had been so beneficial to me that I should have felt selfish if I had checked her mirth. However, Letitia was not as convulsively entertained as I had been.

"Now, dear," I said, when she had finished, "I want you to listen to me. I—I—really do hate to tell you. I—I—can scarcely bring myself to it. But—but—Tamworth insists—"

I withdrew to the back of her chair, where I could not see her face. In low tones, I imparted the gist of Arthur Tamworth's suspicions. It was most distressing; it was painful.

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"The wretch!" cried Letitia, springing to her feet. "To think that we have harbored such a man in our house! Really, Archie, your friends are beneath contempt. Although I am your wife, I don't feel myself called upon to associate with such creatures. How dare you tell me the subject of your indelicate smoking-room orgies? I have always heard that men were disgraceful after dinner. Aunt Julia told me so. She said that coffee after dinner was a signal for all respectable women to withdraw. I did not believe her. Now I do. And to think that my own husband—you—Archie!"

Letitia turned upon me with cheeks aflame. Her indignation was cyclonic. Suddenly, as she gazed upon my helplessness—for she was a girl of moods—her fury seemed to disperse itself. Gradually a reflective look appeared in her eyes. She grew singularly calm. Presently, as I said nothing, she simply stood still, and looked at me, musingly.

"You can easily ask her," I said weakly and huskily, "if—if—she is married."

"Ask her?" cried Letitia, aghast. "Not for the world would I do so. How terribly angry with myself I should feel, if she were married, and how horribly angry with her if she were not! Don't you see

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that it is impossible? It is too awful to contemplate. Perhaps—perhaps—you wouldn't mind asking her."

"Letitia!" I exclaimed, shocked.

"Oh," Letitia gurgled, in tears. "It is quite too wicked to think about! Why—why—did we have that horrid man up to dinner? Poor Olga! She is a good, kind woman. Yesterday, when I had a splitting headache, she bathed my forehead with *eau de cologne*. Aunt Julia herself couldn't have been kinder. I can't believe—"

"But, my girl," I said sympathetically, "if she has a husband, she has surely committed no crime. What Tamworth suggests is—er—pardonable, under those circumstances. We merely want to know. Don't you see—"

"Oh, I see," she cried pettishly, "of course I see. Seeing does not help me at all. You want me to catechize the woman because you are afraid to do so. Men are such cowards. Perhaps she will sue me for libel, if I ask her such questions. I shouldn't complain. I deserve to be sued for libel. I feel like suing myself. And—and—you are quite safe, because you can always say that it isn't the thing for you to interfere in such matters."

"We really ought to have guessed—"

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"*You* really ought to have guessed," she declared unreasonably. "You are six years older than I am. You are a man of the world. Anyway"—triumphantly—"it may not be true. And if I ever find that it isn't, I'll go right down to Mr. Tamworth and tell him what I think of him, in his own office, before all his clerks and typewriters—and yours. He must be a horrible ninny. Really, I wouldn't dare to have such a man around if—if—"

There was nothing more to be said. Letitia was in a mood that made argument uncomfortable, and the topic was not refreshing. I felt relieved that we had threshed the matter out, but a trifle uneasy as to future developments. These weeks had been very pleasant—the only unperturbed period we had spent in our home. Could it be that our brief happiness was for ever over?

At breakfast, next morning, serenity reasserted itself. We were almost inclined to dismiss all thoughts of the previous evening's discomfiture. It all seemed so groundless. We ate our boiled eggs quite placidly. Miss Allallami brought in the coffee and smiled reassuringly at us. Letitia blushed guiltily as she saw her, and I felt quite unworthy and ashamed.

"I do like her face so much," said Letitia quietly, as I looked over the papers. "I don't know when I

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have liked it so well. Not for the world would I vex her. I am trying, Archie, to put myself in her place."

"My dear!"

"I feel like a sister toward her," continued Letitia. "I have rarely been so attached to anybody. I'll tell you what we'll do, Archie—if you agree to it. You know that Aunt Julia has invited us to stay with her over Sunday at Tarrytown. We'll just let things go on as they are for the present. And on Thursday, when we go to Tarrytown, I'll submit the case to Aunt Julia. If she thinks I ought to speak to Olga—I agree to do so. Whatever she advises shall be done. That is fair, isn't it? Tell me, dear, that you are satisfied."

I was satisfied—eminently so. Postponing evils is always a gratifying occupation, and the few remaining days of pleasant domesticity that this arrangement left us seemed delightful. We would eat, drink and be merry, while we could. We would avoid the dreadful subject until Thursday.

The fool's paradise bewitched us as surely as before. Tamworth faded into the distance and the old order reestablished itself. We enjoyed ourselves in our happy little home. When Thursday came, Letitia took quite an affectionate farewell of Miss Allal-

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lami, and off we went to Tarrytown. Had I not reminded Letitia of her agreement, I veritably believe that she would have forgotten it. It seemed a pity to reopen the wound, but I felt that it was cruel to be kind.

Aunt Julia was very much perturbed, and I am bound to say, most disagreeable. She was indignant at Letitia's qualms, and she told me that I was not only weak but unmanly. She insinuated that we were both candidates for the nursery and unfitted to cope with the problems of married life. She seemed to have no doubts as to the truth of Tamworth's abominable innuendo, and, to cap it all, she opined that it was a good thing we had at least one friend who seemed to be sensible and dignified. Letitia was almost in tears. I felt that I positively hated Aunt Julia.

There is no use prolonging the story. The bolt from the blue fell. The blue had seemed so emphatically blue, and the bolt had been so invisible! It made matters worse.

"I shall have to speak to Olga," said poor Letitia, in the train on the way home; "I see that there is no other course to pursue. It seems ten thousand pities to nip the poor girl's affection for us. I dare say she

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is at the window, awaiting our arrival. And I must greet her with an odious catechism."

There was nobody at the window, however. The blinds in the drawing-room were down, and the aspect of the house was *morne*—which is the best adjective, though French, that I can think of. We rang the bell, and, after a pause, the door was opened, and we went up stairs. At the door of our apartment, instead of Miss Allallami, we encountered a strange woman in a white apron. For a moment we stood, direly perplexed.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax?" asked the strange woman, with a pleasant smile.

It was extraordinary. To be asked at one's own door if one were oneself!

We entered without replying. Letitia kept well in the background. I imagined that we should find our apartment looted. Perhaps the strange woman was —looting!

The drawing-room was untouched. Everything was in its proper place, not an ornament missing; not a gewgaw disturbed. The woman was still smiling.

"I congratulate you, Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax," she said with a Finnish intonation. "You will be glad, I know. It occurred yesterday, and it was too late to telegraph. Olga—"

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“What about Olga?” cried Letitia.

“Go on,” I commanded imperiously.

The strange woman simpered, and looked down. “Olga,” she murmured, “Olga has twins—two of the sweetest little babies, a boy and a girl. One she is going to call Archie, and the other Letitia. Oh, she is as well as can be expected. She—”

I looked round quickly, the extent of the calamity breaking in on my dense brain. I turned to Letitia. She had fainted—on the tiger-head.

CHAPTER XVI

I should like to drop this episode, without further comment, where I left it at the close of the last chapter. Personally, I hate dotting i's and crossing t's. An interrogation mark always seems to me most satisfactory—as delightful as the after-theater supper for which somebody else pays. Still, I realize that I am in the minority; that the majority cries for the comfortable adjustment of odds and ends, without any strain upon the imagination.

I must therefore, put the finishing touches to the “incident” of Olga Allallami.

The odd thing about Letitia’s behavior was that her affection for Miss Allallami evaporated so quickly that it made me wonder if my wife could possibly be fickle. It was, however, the twins that settled Letitia. I feel convinced that had cook been guilty of one mere child, Letitia’s sweet womanly nature would have remained sympathetic. The dual blow infuriated her. She thought twins vulgar and most unrefined, and could not bear to discuss them. Perhaps it was just as well. Had Letitia continued to “feel as a sister”

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toward our recalcitrant cook, things would have been very disagreeable, and the indications were that Olga, with one child, would have been allowed full scope.

As it was, we simply abandoned our apartment. We inflicted ourselves upon the long-suffering Aunt Julia, in Tarrytown, and left cook and her brace of children in our home until such time as they could leave it. We learned that Miss Allallami's husband—for she was, indeed, a wife—had been employed in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and had returned to Finland to make a home for his little Olga. She, anxious to earn a few pennies—honest or otherwise—had remained behind, until she felt competent to join him.

"It's a mercy she's married," I said as I heard this, but Letitia's joyous assent was lacking.

"Oh, I don't know," she remarked immorally; "it wouldn't really matter. If she had been respectable enough to have had one little son, or one little daughter, I should have asked no questions."

Miss Allallami's kindly and amiable nature had helped her cause. There had been method in her affability. She had "used" us, so to speak, and Letitia felt quite embittered about it. She declared that she was losing all faith in human nature. It would henceforth be impossible for her to attach herself to anybody. It was enough to sour a seraph, she said. She

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had given real affection to Miss Allallami, and her reward had been—screaming twins. It was maddening. So irate was Letitia, that I nearly pleaded poor Olga's cause.

"The poor woman herself did not anticipate twins," I said weakly.

"Nonsense!" declared Letitia scornfully, "I'm convinced that she *knew*. These Finnish women are so crafty. No, don't argue with me about it, Archie. I'm quite ashamed of the episode. It makes me feel degraded, and I shall never like our apartment again—never. And yet I was so certain of Olga's loyalty!"

"You—you can't say, dear, that she isn't loyal. She is merely—"

"That is enough, Archie," said Letitia, doing like the heroines in the novels, and "drawing herself up to her full height." "That is quite enough. You are singularly lacking in fine sentiment. I dare say that you and your charming Mr. Tamworth—never let me meet him again—will have a high old time chuckling over my misfortune. Yes, I call it *my* misfortune! Let us for ever drop the abominable subject."

And we did. Of course, it had to be threshed out before final abandonment, with Aunt Julia, in whose house we stayed until cook's departure. Mrs. Dinsmore, I grieve to say, was not sympathetic. Some

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people seem to find tragedy amusing, and Aunt Julia was one of them. She said that she should never be able to take us seriously, and asked us to excuse her mirth, *after* she had indulged in it. As we were literally sponging upon her, we were obliged to be indulgent. It was not a pleasant time that we spent in Tarrytown. Aunt Julia offered to return to New York and help Letitia in her housekeeping, until such time as we were "suited"—an offer that Letitia courteously but spiritedly refused.

We found that Miss Allallami's gratitude had taken the form of a photograph of the twins, neatly framed, and hung in the drawing-room. It was a little delicate attention that we failed to appreciate. Letitia tore down the picture and threw it from the window. It was the last allusion to Olga. We seldom mentioned her case again. We were at home once more, as unsettled as though we were just beginning our domestic struggles, and we were determined to face the situation boldly.

"I've been thinking, dear," I said one evening, as we sat dining in the least objectionable restaurant that I could find, "that perhaps if we offered fabulous wages, we could secure a fine cook. Suppose we try it. You know, Letitia, I always put a little money aside for a rainy day, and it seems to me that if I

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refrain from saving and invest it all in cook, we should be more comfortable. It can never rain worse than it is now doing."

Letitia looked radiant. I felt I had made a hit. "You are really a sensible man, after all, Archie," she declared (I could have dispensed with the "after all"). "If you don't mind paying the same wages to cook that she would get with Fifth Avenue millionaires, naturally we can not fail. Moreover, she will have an easier time with us than with them, as we don't give dinner parties or sit down thirty or forty to a meal. It's really a lovely idea. And—and—don't you think, dear, that saving is awfully provincial and petty, and—and—Brooklyn?"

I hadn't looked upon it in that light. Tamworth had advised me to put something aside, as he said that married men were bound to provide for emergencies. I had done this systematically. In the meantime, we were literally "pigging" it. Surely this was the rainy day.

"Why should a young, brainy man like you," continued Letitia, beaming fondly upon me, "worry himself about what *might* happen in the distant future? It seems so—so—little, doesn't it, dear? It is so like the little Brooklyn clerks whom you see trundling baby-carriages and rushing away to savings banks

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with a five-dollar bill. It is really unworthy of the author of *Lives of Great Men*. The thrifty always seem to me so namby-pamby."

"You are overthrowing the doctrines of domestic economy, Letitia," I said with a smile.

"Well, let's do it, Archie. If we can be comfortable, we might as well overthrow things. Oh, I suppose thrift is all right. 'A penny saved'—and all that sort of thing! Let's have a culinary student in the kitchen, and pay her a handsome salary. We shall be happy, and when we are happy, we prosper. That is surely so. We send forth radiant thoughts, and they all work for us. I believe in that. Oh, won't it be fun, Archie?"

There seemed to be logic in this idea. What's the use of saving and being uncomfortable to-day, when we may die to-morrow? We might better invest our money in the certainty of a blissful present, than hoard it in the uncertainty of the future. So we carefully knocked down the elaborate maxims of the "institutions for savings," and felt relieved.

"It is absurd," said Letitia, as she dipped the tips of her fingers into a rosy finger-bowl, "all this business of economy. Suppose you *were* incapacitated, Archie, do you imagine that I am quite helpless? I could teach Latin, and there must be hundreds of

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girls just crazy to read Ovid in the original. Or, I could learn typewriting, or bookkeeping, or other ugly but profitable accomplishments. We should never starve. I could even go on the stage, if *everything* else failed."

"Only if everything else failed, my dear," I suggested.

"Oh, of course; as the very last thing. So many girls do it. If they are too silly to teach, or too unsympathetic to get married, or too lazy to learn anything, they go on the stage, and get lovely salaries. I shouldn't select the life of an actress, but if—"

"We won't discuss such possibilities," I said firmly. "It is unnecessary to do so. My *Lives of Great Men* is nearly finished. It is the sort of book that every home will be obliged to store. There are seventy million people in the United States. Let us put down seven million homes, at a low estimate, and there you are with seven million books yielding us a royalty—not including the sales in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. The prospect is really alluring."

"So it is, Archie," she assented jubilantly, "and here we are, discussing saving, like Sarah Jane and her young man. It is very narrow of us. I forgot your book. And yet literature is most profitable, and such a necessity! The other day, down-town, I saw

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the complete works of Shakespeare—plays and poems
—bound in leather for fifty cents.”

“My book will cost five dollars,” I said rather hesitantly.

“Well, dear, it’s so much *newer* than Shakespeare,” she asserted triumphantly. “I don’t suppose that it will last quite as long—I could not say that, Archie—but while it is selling, it may as well sell for five dollars. Nobody ever thinks of competing with Shakespeare. I’m very proud of your *Lives of Great Men* though you have never read any of it to me.”

“Perhaps that’s why,” I suggested, temporarily moody, as most genius is said to be.

“You’re a silly boy, and I’m not going to flatter you by telling you how much more interested I am in Archibald Fairfax than in William Shakespeare. You shall read me your *Lives of Great Men* as soon as we have our cook. In the meantime, I’m so glad you have decided not to save. Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. It is hard to do those three things, at a seventy-five-cent *table-d’hôte*.”

“And the ‘to-morrow we die’ doesn’t seem so hard?”

“No, it doesn’t, really, Archie. The way we are living now is enough to drive anybody to pessimism. It is unnatural; it is wrong: we will spend our money, and be happy.”

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There is one certain thing about New York. You can get anything you want in that "tuberosity of civilized life" if you have the wherewithal, or, in other words, "the price." It is what Europeans call the middle classes that suffer the most in the American metropolis, whereas in other capitals, it is they that are the happiest. The extremely indigent and the inflatedly wealthy never complain of New York City. It is the neither-rich-nor-poor who find life difficult and are unable to gratify the innate need for refinement and comfort; who discover that graceful life is a knotty problem, and that the art of "keeping up appearances" with moderate means is well-nigh impossible. New York is the Mecca of the rich and the poor; it is the Hades of the unhappy medium. Those who are just "comfortable" in London, are "just uncomfortable" in New York.

So we set about the discovery of an expensive cook. We pored over the advertisements in the daily papers, in a determined hunt for something eminently first-class. Letitia rather fancied an "Alsatian chef" who had been with the "finest families in Europe and America," and modestly asked one hundred dollars per month, but I felt suspicious.

"You remember, dear," I said warningly, "that Mrs. Potzenheimer came or did not come from the

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Vanderbilts. At any rate, she said she did. You probably recall the fact that the Duchess of Marlborough fancied her cooking."

"Let bygones be bygones," remarked Letitia solemnly. "Archie, don't be mean."

The "Alsatian chef," according to his plaintive call in the newspaper, announced that he was "first-class in every respect," but I couldn't bear the idea of a man hanging around all day in our cramped and modern apartment. It would probably be most embarrassing.

"You know, dear," I said, "you were very fond of asking the others to do odd jobs, and you couldn't possibly request an Alsatian chef to wash out a few handkerchiefs."

"I hope I understand the etiquette of the arrangement as well as you do," she retorted, quite vexed. "I am perfectly well aware that a chef wouldn't do anything of the sort. I believe, Archie Fairfax, that I am quite able to cope with these matters."

We learned, after incessant study of the advertising columns, that the expensive cooks emphasized "desserts, soups, jellies" in their list of attractions, and that the others never mentioned them. Jellies seemed to be the great distinguishing mark—the

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boundary line, as it were—between the expensive and the non-expensive. This was invariable. No sooner did a cook say “jelly” than she demanded treble wages. It seemed as though, to be luxurious, one must dote on jelly.

“And yet,” said Letitia ruefully, “I really don’t care very much about it. I’d much sooner engage a woman who understood eggs *à la reine*. Jelly seems to me so insipid. I don’t suppose that we should want it once in a blue moon. All these women harp so on jellies, don’t they, Archie? There must be some reason for it. I was never brought up to consider jellies as a great accomplishment.”

“I suppose they really mean ‘jellies’ to cover all sorts of sweets,” I suggested. “You see, dear, pie sounds rather vulgar. In this city, nobody thinks anything of pie. Undoubtedly, however, the woman who announces her accomplishment in jellies intends to imply pastries of all kinds.”

“It may be so, of course. But as we are not quite sure, that question must be asked. It would be dreadful if we engaged a cook, at prohibitive wages, and then found that we had to live on nasty, wobbly jelly. Besides, it sounds so invalid-y to me. I’m so accustomed to taking jelly to anybody who has a cold, or

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who happens to be out of sorts, that I really dislike it. Why, only yesterday, Archie, I sent some jelly to Mrs. Archer, who has a stiff neck."

"Here's one," I said, bringing my index finger to a sudden standstill in its chute down the advertising columns; "elegant pastries; table decorations a specialty; French dishes, jellies.' You see, she ends at jellies, but does not begin with them. She has been 'with the finest families in the Faubourg St. Germain, Paris.' She is 'reliable'—and odiously expensive."

"That doesn't matter, we have decided," chirped Letitia. "We may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I rather fancy that advertisement, dear. Let me see: 'Address, Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle."

"We could call her Cynthie," I ventured in a light mood.

"Please don't jest. We can be frivolous, later on—when we are not hungry. The advertisement reads very well, and in a case like this, even if she can't do all that she announces, it won't matter at all. For instance, we may find that 'table decorations a specialty' is just a pure ghost story. I shouldn't care a bit; should you? As long as the table is neatly set, with a pretty plant, a table-center, and delicately folded serviettes, the other decorations wouldn't matter in the least."

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"There you are right, Letitia," I assented. "I don't suppose that she would place a bottle of Worcestershire sauce in the middle of the table as a decoration, like—"

"You are always dragging up those detestable women whom we are trying to forget," asserted Letitia petulantly. "Do, for goodness' sake, forget the past. We are going to place things on a different footing. We are going to engage the best and be satisfied with the merely—better. I think I shall go and see Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle. The 'elegant pastries' capture me. I'm so sick of bread pudding and baked apples. Her name, too, is reassuring. Of course, you know—or should know—that a French cook is the most economical person on earth. It is a science with her. What other people throw away, she makes into *ragoût*, or *croquettes*, or *blanquette*, and other delightful things all ending in 'ette'."

"I believe they call it hash, here," I interrupted.

"What they call hash here," said Letitia spitefully, "is just a horrid resurrection, not fit for plowboys. The French housewife cooks very differently. Why, even the *pot au feu* is delicious, and what could be cheaper? She serves an exquisite soup, and she offers the meat with which it was made in an appe-

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tizing way. We shall certainly save money in one direction, Archie, even if we spend it in another."

"You seem thoroughly to understand the art of cooking, Letitia," I said admiringly. "I wonder that you never went in for it."

"I understand it theoretically," she said sedately. "It is, of course, a science, and if I had to begin life again, I would go to Paris and study. Girls go there to cultivate the voice; I'd go to cultivate the stomach. But it is too late now. I admire the French knack and system. They produce masterpieces of gastronomic skill at a moderate cost. Here they throw away the delicate parts of meat and fish because they don't know what to do with them; there, they use them artistically and economically."

"If you really think that Madame de Lyrolle can do all this—"

"I'm sure she can, Archie. I feel it intuitively. Of course, she asks a fearful remuneration, but as long as she thinks she can get it, you can't blame her for asking. At home, she might probably be an ordinary cook, getting nothing a month, with privileges; here, she would probably be a wonder, and is entitled to high wages. Please—please let us have her, Archie."

"And the Alsatian chef?"

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"You provoking boy! You know he didn't appeal to you and that you brought me round to your way of thinking"—oh, Letitia!—"and I gave in, as I always give in, because you are such a hopelessly spoiled person. You know you thought the Alsatian chef wouldn't wash my handkerchiefs. Well, though I shall never ask her to do so, I'm sure that Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle would gladly help me. Any-way, I want her. May I—may I—go and see about it?"

Letitia spoke wheedlingly, with the old charm that I had never been able to resist. It was as potent as ever.

"One thing, Letitia," I said, "what *could* we call the woman? It would be so embarrassing to address her as Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle. Imagine calling out, 'Please come here, Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle, I want to speak to you.' You must arrange to address her as Mary, or—or Sarah."

"Don't be silly, Archie. You are straining at trifles. We can call her Madame. It sounds French-y, and impressive. That is the least of our difficulties, and not worth considering. To-morrow morning, I shall go and interview her, and—you noble boy—I know that you will never regret the expense. You like to see me happy, don't you?"

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"Oh, Letitia, have I ever—"

"Of course. I know you do. I've never doubted it for one moment, even with our darkest cook. And I *am* happy at the mere idea of Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle. Say you consent; say it as though you meant it; say 'Letitia, please, like a dear, go and engage Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle, for I want her?' Say that, please."

I said it. There was even a tinge of emphatic yearning in my voice. The outsider, could he have heard me, might have believed that life, without Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle, would be a blank. Strangest thing of all—I quite believed that I wanted her. Letitia's influence was hypnotic.

CHAPTER XVII

There were evidently difficulties in the way of the immediate annexation of Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle. When I reached home next evening I found Letitia in cookless solitude, a dinnerless dining-room, and the indications of another restaurant repast. My wife looked somewhat excited, as though she had much to tell me, and I felt that, perchance, the course of French cook did not run smooth. I had arrived at the stage when nothing connected with the domestic life could surprise me; I was persistently prepared for the worst, and quite disposed to regard the best as a luxury. Possibly in time I should even grow philosophic—not that I owned the temperament of the confirmed philosopher.

When we were seated at table, in our selected restaurant, and I had chosen the lesser of two evils—or of two soups—Letitia's pent-up excitement burst forth, and—well, conversation did not flag.

"It is going to be so very much more expensive than I thought, Archie," she said. "I called upon Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrollè to-day, and found her

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exceedingly distinguished—I might almost say haughty. She spoke English as well as I do, and I could scarcely realize that she was French. Her aptitude for languages, she told me, was quite remarkable. Everything seemed satisfactory, until—until she asked about—about the butler. Had we a reliable butler? She considered a docile, reliable butler almost indispensable. I know I turned scarlet, for I felt quite humiliated as I had to inform her that we didn't keep a butler."

The soup had made its appearance, but Letitia was too engrossed to touch it. I was not.

"She smiled rather provokingly," continued Letitia, "but told me not to be discouraged. She has a nephew, a respectable young man, born here, whom she has been coaching in the duties of a butler. She suggested that he would be of great value and comfort to us, as, being her relative, she could work with him in perfect harmony."

"But you know, my girl," I interrupted rather testily, "that we couldn't put up a butler. There isn't space in this apartment, unless—unless he roomed with his aunt."

"I warn you, Archie, that if you begin to be funny—"

"I can't think of any other way in which we could

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accommodate a butler. A nice Japanese screen in his aunt's room—”

Letitia was a lovely subject to tease. She took everything to heart so promptly! It seems an undignified confession to make, but my little wife never amused me more than when she was in rebellion at what she called my levity. After all, a man must have a little fun in the dreary drabness of his cookless home.

I continued heartlessly: “If you don’t like that idea, I have another. Rather than deprive Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle of the services of her dear nephew, we could arrange things this way: you could room with Madame and I with the butler. You must admit, dear, that there would be no glaring impropriety in that.”

This time Letitia smiled and was saved. She made strenuous efforts to remain vexed, as I could see, but in spite of herself she was moved to a suspicion of mirth, and it did her good.

“Don’t be a silly boy,” she said, “and reserve your ingenuity. We need it in serious and not frivolous matters. I told Madame de Lyrolle that we occupied an apartment, which was not particularly spacious, and that much as we should like to employ her nephew, we could not possibly see our way to do so. She was

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disappointed. She then asked me about first maids, and second maids, and—and oh, Archie, I felt disgraced. I made up my mind to abandon Madame de Lyrolle."

Letitia paused, and remembered her soup. She toyed with it nonchalantly.

"She spoke quite kindly," resumed Letitia. "Of course, she said, we must understand that she never left her kitchen. As for doing anything else but cooking and decorating the table in case of dinner parties—that would be impossible. She insisted that she was an artist; that she had real temperament; that she was occasionally inspired, and then again depressed."

"That means a depressed dinner from time to time," I muttered gloomily.

"No," said Letitia firmly, "not if surrounding conditions are auspicious. I quite understood her sentiments, Archie. They were not at all unreasonable. The artistic temperament does not lurk merely with third-rate actors or fourth-rate novelists. A French cook may assuredly possess it. She told me that in moments of mental exaltation she has given to the world dishes of wonderful import. For instance, on one occasion when her mood was dreamy and mystic, she made a *salmi* of black game that the editor of the

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Paris *Figaro* said was worthy of being dramatized. Oh, she talked a good deal, and in a high-falutin' strain, and I liked her, but—”

“Did you engage her?”

“I am coming to that question. Finally, she told me that as we hadn't a maid, and as she positively refused to appear in the dining-room herself, she could merely suggest that if I engaged her, I also engage a bright young girl, now living with her, a niece—”

“She seems to have quite a family!”

“I saw the girl, who was named Leonie. She was as pretty as a picture. One could imagine her as the French maid in comedy—one of those dainty little things that wear fluffy white aprons, and occasionally do a dance. You know, Archie. The girl seemed quite willing to join her aunt, but she asked a large salary—more than we paid any of our cooks. So, you see, I didn't like to engage Madame de Lyrolle without first consulting you. It will be much more expensive than we thought. In addition to Madame's exorbitant salary, there will be Leonie, and—and—do you think we could afford it?”

It is horrid for a young husband to admit to a young wife that there is anything in the world he can't afford. At least I felt that way. Letitia wait-

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ed almost piteously for my reply, and I detested the idea of doing the poor. She looked unusually pretty, with her flushed face and her red, emotional lips. Moreover, the dinner was hateful, the cooking immoral, and the surroundings impossible. I was tempted, and—I fell.

“We might try it, Letitia,” I said. “You know my book is nearly finished, and in a home that *is* a home, I fancy I can do so much more.”

“Oh, thank you, Archie, thank you. You are a good, brave, noble boy. I am convinced that you won’t regret it, and we shall be so cozy and happy. I think you are right. We might as well enjoy life while we are young. I dare say that when we are old we shan’t mind bread pudding, and baked apples, and mutton stew, and—and—hash.”

“I shall always loathe hash,” I asserted vehemently.

Our dinner ended delightfully. We could not eat the food, but the meal was intellectual rather than material. We chatted affably, and no outsider could possibly have imagined that we were married. Our manner was that of the newly engaged.

“Of course, Madame de Lyrolle is Americanized,” said Letitia. “I could see that. In Paris, cooks, chambermaids and nurses receive just about half the wages they get here. Servants in France are quite

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oppressed. They don't know the meaning of a 'Sunday out.' They are dependent upon the caprices of Monsieur and Madame. And I dare say you know, Archie, that even in the most luxurious French households the most rigid economies are practised. Some-where I read that the refuse that leaves a French kitchen would starve a small family of rats; which is perhaps the reason why there are so few rats in Paris."

"It seems almost a pity that she *is* Americanized, don't you think, dear?"

"Oh, she could never *quite* lose her French training, Archie. Perhaps she is Americanized only in the mat-ters of salary and privileges."

"At any rate," I said, "she won't bathe in the kitchen—or anywhere else. French people rarely do."

"They have been brought up to dislike water," re-marked Letitia reflectively. "In Paris, even little children are taught that it is impure and are coaxed to drink claret. Probably by dint of harping on the impurity of water, they come to the conclusion that it is rather silly to wash in it. Don't you think so, Archie? It seems to be a trait of the national char-acter. Yet they are a cleanly race. They don't ad-vertise their ablutions as we do. In England and America we talk so much about cold tubs, and the

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latest improvements in bath-room apparatus! It is quite indelicate when you come to think of it."

So Letitia went down next morning to secure the Gallic prize with its Gallic appendage. Madame de Lyrolle had laughed at the idea of references. She had lived with a Wall Street broker, she told Letitia, with an air of such importance that it was clear she regarded him in about the same class as the president of the French Republic. She had cooked for the French embassy in Washington, and for various people who had honored places in "Who's Who?"—to say nothing of "What's What." Most of her references were traveling in Europe. They summered in England; autumned in France; wintered in Egypt; and sprung—I mean springed—in Germany. They were Americans, but there never seemed to be any part of the year that they dedicated to their own country. They had European resorts for the four seasons of the year. Had there been a fifth, they might possibly have deigned to spend it in America, but in default of a supplementary season, they could not be reached in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

The arrival of Madame de Lyrolle in our modest homestead seemed to be somewhat revolutionary. At

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any rate, immediate joy was lacking. The first view I obtained of Letitia, after the advent of the lady from France, convinced me that something had crushed her. Her feathers were ruffled, so to speak. She was sitting pensively in the drawing-room, in an evening gown, and although her heart's desire, and her heart's desire's niece, were in the kitchen, there was no exultant satisfaction visible upon Letitia's mobile features.

"My girl!" I cried, astonished. "I certainly expected to find you in the seventh heaven!"

"It's nothing, Archie," she said, with an evident effort, as I sat down beside her; "I am just depressed. I spent the afternoon in the kitchen with Madame de Lyrolle, at her request, and—and—I feel about an inch high. I feel cheap, common, and—if you don't mind my being colloquial—like thirty cents."

She really looked the part. My little wife seemed to have shrunk most positively.

"Madame de Lyrolle and Leonie," she began, "are both so impressive that they awed me. The former begged me courteously to explain things to her in the kitchen before she assumed the reins of management, as she called it. Naturally I complied with her request, although it seemed to me a bit unnecessary.

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The first thing we did was to go through the table appointments, and—and—you can't imagine how—how humiliating it was."

"Humiliating?" I exclaimed indignantly. "And why, pray?"

"Well, Archie, Madame de Lyrolle appeared to think them inadequate. There are so many things that we lack. One of her first demands was for the asparagus tongs, and—and—when I told her that we had never used any, I saw her smile and—glance at Leonie. And Leonie smiled, too, and—and then they both smiled together. She asked me if we had individual asparagus holders, and—and—then there were more smiles."

Letitia's face was burning, and she was apparently re-sampling her humiliation.

"After that," she continued, "she asked me where we kept the grape-scissors, and again I had to admit that we had none. 'Oh,' she remarked quite scornfully, 'and how do you separate grapes? You don't pull them apart?' Of course we do, Archie, but I dreaded to say so. I think I stammered, and once more I saw her exchange glances with Leonie. I could have burst into tears when she asked for the orange cups. It was absolutely galling. Honestly, I thought they would have left the house immediately

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when I confessed to the absence of orange cups. I might have committed a crime, Madame de Lyrolle looked black, and Leonie pursed her lips. Madame said that never—never during her artistic career (those were her words) had she affiliated (her word) with people who failed in the matter of orange cups."

"I wouldn't use them," I interrupted angrily. "Thank goodness, while I have my health and strength, I can peel an orange with my good old fingers and a knife."

"Hush, dear. After the orange-cup episode, she seemed to regard me with a sort of tender pity. I'm sure she considered me a Goth, and—and—nobody has ever done that before. To be pitied by one's cook! Oh, it was horrible. When it came to the silver, which as you know, dear, is mostly quadruple plate—silver in name only—I was reduced to a sort of pulp. She and Leonie examined it critically, positively looking for marks on it, and I should have hated to hear their comments in my absence. 'I have never served food in anything but sterling silver before,' said Madame. 'Just imagine my *salmi* of black game, in an *entrée* dish of quadruple plate! Why, the delicacy of the flavor would be ruined. I'm afraid I shall not be able to achieve a *salmi*.'

I began to experience a slight symptom of Letitia's

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humiliation, as I realized that while I might one day be a successful author, I could never—never—be a Wall Street broker!

"I told her," Letitia resumed, bitterly mortified, "that we would try to do without the *salmi*. We would endeavor to drag on a wretched existence without black game. I meant this for sarcasm, but it didn't take. Her lip curled. 'As Madame wishes,' she said contemptuously. Of course, some of our silver is not quadruple plate—the salt-cellars and the cruets. I longed for her to reach them. Would you believe it, Archie, she was not interested? Artists, she said, did not sanction the appearance on table of salt-cellars or cruets. Food should be properly seasoned before it left the kitchen. Salt-cellars and cruets belonged to the barbarous table notions of uneducated English and Americans."

"Really, Letitia, I don't think we can—"

"Don't, please. It is all right now. I'm just telling you what *did* happen, so that you can sympathize with me. I've been through it all—alone. She then told me that while salt-cellars on a dinner table were unnecessary, *bonbonnières* filled with dainty candy were rigidly called for. When she saw our *bonbonnières*, she and Leonie turned quietly aside. You remember, Archie, they were theater souvenirs that

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Aunt Julia gave us. One celebrated the one hundredth performance of *The Masqueraders*, the other the fiftieth performance of *The Girl With the Green Eyes*. I really felt quite abject. I—I—positively longed for—for Mrs. Potzenheimer."

Poor Letitia! It was cruel. Gladly would I have spared her such chagrin.

"I don't think she meant to cause me pain," she went on. "She is merely swell, and she seemed to wonder why we, who lacked these luxuries, had engaged so expensive a culinary artist. Perhaps it was natural, but—I really couldn't put myself in her place, though it must have been much more comfortable than *mine!* I was glad when the silver inspection was over. It wouldn't have been so bad if I had been alone with Madame, but Leonie was there, like a hateful echo, and that made it so fearfully trying. Next, I had to introduce her to the glass. Oh!"

I dreaded to hear about the glass. What would she think of my tumblers, at ninety-six cents a dozen, bought to replace the wedding present that Potzenheimer and Birdie had smashed between them!

"She asked to see the cut-glass," said Letitia, and this time there was a wan smile on her lips. "I felt that she would indeed be extraordinarily clever—in fact, *clairvoyante*—if she could see the cut-glass, for

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I couldn't. There was the decanter, that was cut-glass only as to the stopper, and there was the salad-bowl, that is merely near-cut-glass. When she saw the tumblers"—I winced—"I really thought that she would throw them out of the window. 'Even *vin ordinaire* would be tasteless in them,' she said. 'I should like to see the best tumblers, those that you use for dinner parties, and on state occasions.'"

Letitia came to a standstill, as though she had at last reached the meeting of the waters and was pausing before tackling the conflict.

"Just then, Archie, it occurred to me," she said slowly, "that nothing—nothing could save us but a good, big, carefully conceived, well-directed, artistic, whopping lie!"

"That's right!" I cried viciously. "I forgive you beforehand."

"Why should we be intimidated by a cook?" she asked oratorically. "I asked myself that, and I could find no answer. Here we were about to ruin ourselves to give this woman employment, being cross-examined by her, as though we were prisoners at the bar. Moreover, it was a case of two to one—she and Leonie against me! So I remained quiet for a few moments, as I came to the conclusion that nobody could cope with all this but a really beautiful, unabashed liar!"

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"I can't bear to hear you talk like that, Letitia," I said, my viciousness vanishing, as I realized the full force of Letitia's irreligious resolution.

"I suddenly turned upon her," said Letitia, not heeding my plaintiveness, "in a well-assumed fury. It was a condition that I found no difficulty in simulating. 'I have listened to your impertinent catechism for a long time, Madame,' I said, 'and now it's my turn. No doubt you are surprised to find our appointments so meager. The fact is, that as we don't know you, and as your references are all at the antipodes, we have sent all our valuables to my aunt's country seat in Tarrytown. The gold dinner set, that we use every day; the antique silver table ornaments, the priceless salad-bowl, punch-bowl, and tumblers; the wonderful knives, and the marvelous forks—all have gone to Tarrytown, because we don't know you, there to stay until we do! You see, we have been victimized by cooks, and though an artist, you are yet a cook.' "

"Good!" I exclaimed triumphantly. "Bravo! You're a genius, Letitia. It was a masterpiece."

"I must confess that after my brave words, I felt terribly frightened. I experienced a sort of reaction that made me quite weak. I thought that this would end all the roseate allurements of Madame de Lyrolle,

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and that she would instantly quit. I felt positively harrowed, as it occurred to me that we should have to begin over again, and that all our efforts had gone for nothing. Would you believe it, Archie? She was as meek as Moses, while Leonie absolutely fawned!"

"You clever girl!"

"As for instantly quitting, she seemed to fear that I should request her to do so. 'I meant no impertinence,' she said quite humbly, 'and I think you were right about the gold dishes. One can't be too careful.' The gold dishes caught her, Archie. I felt almost sorry that I hadn't studded them with a few diamonds. But one can't think of everything! Aunt Julia's country seat, in Tarrytown, also made a hit. It seemed to shed a reflected luster upon us. She asked several questions—oh, very deferentially—about it, and I could see that we had gone up in her estimation. As I am really anxious to keep her, Archie, and to be comfortable for a little while, I thought it advisable to be vulgarly ostentatious on the subject of Aunt Julia. I told her that my aunt was fabulously wealthy, and hated the idea of our living so unpretentiously in New York, in a small apartment. I put it all down to you, dear. I cooked up a story of a *mésalliance*. I had married you against

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Aunt Julia's wishes. You were poor and of rather common parentage, but I loved you, I said."

"You needn't have lied *quite* so artistically, Letitia," I said, rather hurt.

"Isn't it quite true that I love you?" she asked lightly. "What an ungrateful boy! So long as we have a good cook, what matters anything? I began quite to enjoy my own romance. I felt like the Lady of Lyons, and nearly told her about the horrid home to which you took me. I said that the idea of a French cook was all mine. You had literally starved me, because you have been brought up to think corned-beef and cabbage the truest luxury."

"I think it *most* unnecessary, Letitia," I said emphatically, "to make me out a boor—to paint me in such colors to a cook. I should never have believed—"

"I *had* to put finishing touches," she declared. "Don't you see, Archie, that it was important to follow up the gold plates with something dramatic? What does it matter to you how she regards you? As long as she is a good cook and behaves herself, surely you don't care what she thinks of you. Moreover, though she *may* look upon you as low, she considers *me* as a sort of Lady Clara Vere de Vere, most aristocratic and well worth working for. Isn't that enough, Archie? Oh, dear, I *wish* I could induce you

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to be awfully coarse and disgusting, before her! It would be such a help."

~~I~~ rose, and walked away, thoroughly put out.
"You are carrying the joke too far!" I said sullenly.

"Oh, what a silly, sensitive boy it is!" she sighed.
"And oh, how it cares what even its cook thinks of it!
I did all this for your sake, Archie. You can imagine
that I shouldn't select a low husband from choice. I
merely thought that it made the whole story hang
together. That's all. Of course, you can be your-
self if you prefer it. Madame de Lyrolle can always
think that I am refining you, and that you are gradu-
ally acquiring decency."

"I won't have it, Letitia," I interrupted furiously;
"I don't see the fun. I positively refuse to be belit-
tled in my own house."

"Archie, you're almost *too* silly to kiss," she said,
kissing me, "and I don't think you deserve to be
kissed, either. Here have I been cudgeling my brains
all day to devise means to retain a cook that will
please you! I have been bullied, and humiliated, and
forced to lie, and falsify, and perjure my soul. And,
after I have been through it all, and emerged safely
on the other side, weak, but victorious, you sulk, be-
cause—because—you don't see the fun! There is no
fun to see. Nobody knows that better than I do."

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Come, sir, apologize at once, to your lawful wife, or I shall immediately go and tell Madame that you are of noble birth, and that I've been guying her—that you are really quite obstreperously decent. Come, Archie, your apology, please."

I was slightly mollified, but—"Remember, Letitia," I insisted, "I decline to be low."

She laughed tantalizingly. "You needn't be *too* low," she said, "just a little bit 'off' will do. Even if you only promise to tuck your table-napkin under your chin and look greedy, I shall be satisfied. Apologize to me, or off I trot to Madame—" and she rose to go.

"Come back, Letitia," I cried. "You are really intolerable. I apologize. I apologize. You're a martyr, and I—I—"

"You're a respectable coal-heaver, dear," she said with malice and a kiss.

CHAPTER XVIII

“And they lived happily ever after!” If the advent of Madame de Lyrolle had only been the cue for that sweet, old-fashioned culmination—that dulcet, though generally inartistic surcease from trouble! But, of course, it was not. My readers will probably say that sheer dramatic justice cries out for our speedy chastisement. Alas! Sheer dramatic justice did not have to cry long. It pursued us relentlessly, raveningly. We were innocent as Pompeii confidingly couched beside the dread Vesuvius. This is not the place to say that we deserved it. Surely, if Letitia and I have made one solitary friend during the progress of this “sad, eventful history,” he, or she, will refrain from the luxurious “I told you so!”

I am not comparing Madame de Lyrolle to Vesuvius. No. I have never been vicious, and I should scorn to do so rank an injustice to—Vesuvius! There are methods of confounding, more subtile than that of a swift and merciful eruption, methods that—er—“get there just the same.” Alas! Also, *misericordia!*

Thanks to Letitia’s iridescent mendacity, our house-

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hold effects were no longer bones of contention. Madame gracefully condescended to live with us and be our cook, and Leonie, equally gracefully, deigned to support the culinary star. They both persisted in regarding Letitia as a darling of fortune, marred. And I was the marrer. Leonie, who waited upon us, paid me but scant attention and looked upon me as of no consequence. If I addressed her, she replied as to one of her own kind; in fact, it occurred to me that I was considered as a wickedly lucky mortal, who, by some freak of fate, had been plucked from a butler's life to desecrate that of the husband of an American heiress.

Madame asked for half her salary in advance. "We do not know you," Letitia had said to her. The inference was that she, on the other hand, did not know Letitia. She was not taking any risks. Although our gold dishes were at Tarrytown, Madame cautiously decided to assure herself that some of the metal of which the dishes were made remained in New York.

"Leonie is to do the marketing for Madame," said Letitia, on the morning of the first day; "and I think that arrangement very satisfactory. I have supplied her with money—more than she could possibly need, for I did not want to seem 'close'—and at

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the end of the week we can go over the accounts. It all seems delightful, doesn't it, dear?"

It did, indeed, and our first dinner confirmed our sensation of pleasure. There was no deception. We began with a *purée mongole*, and proceeded with frogs *à la poulette*. Dainty little lamb chops, *à la maintenon*, roast grass plovers, a salad that was nearly poetic, and a delicious sweet, known as cream *renversée*, made us feel almost too nice to be at home. As for the after-dinner coffee, it was—sepia ecstasy. Perhaps we *were* fastidious; undoubtedly the dear folks who say that they revel in plain food delicately prepared in pure water, will sniff at this program. Still, I should not like to set it before them with any hopes of finding remnants. Those dear folks who love plain food! The grapes are so sour!

Leonie almost threw the food at me, but she served Letitia most obsequiously. I was glad to see my little wife so well taken care of, but I must admit that I made frantic efforts to redeem myself in the hand-maiden's sight. I tried to indicate, unostentatiously, education and refinement. Weak I may be, but I hated to be regarded as a vulgarian.

The maid was a great restraint upon us. There she stood at the back of Letitia's chair like a Nemesis. We had to restrict our conversation to glittering gen-

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eralties. She drank in our words, unbudgingly. Her eyes were riveted on Letitia's plate, and my wife was plied with food unceasingly. I am sorry to say that I had to ask for some more of the cream *renversée*. In fact, I had to ask twice, before I got it, and then it was pushed rather rudely before me.

"It is like a dream," said Letitia purringly, when we were alone in the drawing-room. "You see, nothing was over-stated in the advertisement. It was all quite true."

"I only wish we had a theater on, or a party to go to, or something to do," I said longingly. "It seems wicked to sit still and read, after a dinner like that. We ought to move—stir—walk."

"Of course it *would* be nicer," acquiesced Letitia. "That will come later. I dare say that Madame will spur us to sociability."

We sat, and read, and digested. Letitia seemed drowsy; I felt heavy, and disinclined for exertion. The richness of our repast was undeniable. Letitia's remark that it was like a dream was not irrelevant, but the dream was a nightmare. A more awe-inspiring night I have never spent. I dreamed that Gerda Lyberg was holding me down and throttling me, while Mrs. Potzenheimer and Birdie Miriam McCaffrey did a *cachucha* apiece on my body. I awoke, dripping

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with perspiration, to find Letitia agitatedly pacing up and down the bedroom.

"Nothing—nothing would induce me to go to sleep again, Archie," she said excitedly. "Don't ask me to. I shall sit up for the rest of the night. I dreamed that I went in the kitchen and found Madame de Lyrolle boiling Olga Allallami's twins!"

Breakfast was so elaborate that it made me late for the office. There were eggs, *& la bonne femme*, and porgies, *& la Horly*. Madame had also prepared pigs' feet with *sauce Robert*, which we were obliged to refuse. In fact, most of the breakfast was left. There was enough for at least ten people, each with a healthy appetite. But, as Letitia said, nothing would be wasted. These French cooks understood the science of economy. It was one of their finest points.

The second dinner was an artistic continuation of the first. It consisted of broiled trout, sweetbreads, and ptarmigan. Madame had made pathetic inquiries about the wine-cellar, and Letitia, in humiliation, had been forced to tell her that the wine-cellar was under the bed in the spare-room. There we kept a few bottles of claret and a case of champagne. We were not collectors. We knew very little about wines, and did not belong to the class that discusses a vintage as though it were a religion. Madame's artistic nature

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needed a stimulant, and Letitia told her to take what she required. Owing to the location of the wine-cellar, it called for no key.

Our appetite was not as keen on this second occasion, though we did fair justice to the bill of fare. It was most ridiculously generous.

"It is a pity that we don't *know* anybody," said Letitia discontentedly; "it seems so greedy for us to sit down alone to such a dinner. We should appreciate it so much more if we had company. Don't you agree with me, dear? Positively, I feel gluttonous. I should enjoy people sharing this with us. We might ask Aunt Julia, or Mrs. Archer, or—"

"Tamworth?"

"Tamworth!" cried Letitia angrily. "No, Archie, that man shall never enter this house again. If he came to dinner, Madame would surely have triplets—or something horrible. Tamworth is unlucky. I look upon him as responsible for Olga Allallami's—"

"Letitia!"

"You know what I mean. I associate him with our first knowledge of that disaster, and—I shall hate him for ever. So don't suggest Tamworth. No," she said querulously to Leonie, who was hovering over her with cabinet pudding, *à la Sadi-Carnot*. "I can't really eat any sweets to-night. I am sorry, be-

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cause the pudding looks so nice. Perhaps it will do for to-morrow."

"Madame is joking," Leonie murmured deferentially. "The pudding would be impossible to-morrow."

Rather than sit still and read again, we went to a music-hall and walked there! It was not the music-hall that we wanted, but the exertion of getting to it. Anything rather than another series of nightmares.

"Madame is certainly a wonder," said Letitia, as we listened to a blatant comedian holding up the stage. "It is marvelous how these French women can make a little money go a long way. Just think of the perpetual surprises she offers us, and of her knowledge of the market. While her wages are quite ridiculously high—I wouldn't dare to discuss the matter with Aunt Julia—you will find that in the long run we shall not be out of pocket, owing to the French system of economy."

"The table is certainly most liberal," I remarked, "though nothing ever seems to return. I noticed, dear, that at each meal we have something new."

"That is her art," said Letitia delightedly. "Constant surprise—that is the maxim of the French cook. I forgot to say, dear, that I gave her twenty-five dollars for kitchen utensils. She wanted *sauviettes* and

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casseroles, and dozens of things we have never had. Of course, this expense can never occur again. She laughed at our old tins, and declared that they would ruin anything."

The week passed uneventfully—unless we may consider our meals as events. We lived on the "fat of the land" in bounteous doses, and accepted it as our merited portion. Madame seemed to awaken from her artistic lethargy, and once or twice her temperament surprised us. She and Leonie waxed so lively in the kitchen that we were startled. Then again, they seemed to quarrel rather vociferously. Letitia asserted that she heard Madame exclaim on one occasion: "*Mon Dieu!*!" but I could have sworn that it was "Hully Jee!" It seemed absurd to mistake one for the other. Probably I was wrong, though as Letitia was expecting French she would be likely to imagine that she heard it. Why, however, should Madame de Lyrolle of the Faubourg St. Germain, cry "Hully Jee"? Then we realized that corks popped noisily and uncannily, and the inference seemed unmistakable that either Leonie, or Madame, or both, had been groping under the bed-wine-cellar. However, we did not mind that. The artistic temperament yearns for an occasional vinous coaxing.

Letitia talked persistently of the joy of surprise.

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That surprise is, nevertheless, not inevitably joyous, was a fact rather rudely borne in upon us. The day of reckoning came, and the "fat of the land" stared us starkly in the face. The evening that I usually dedicate to the signing of the tradesmen's checks arrived. We had dined particularly well, the main feature of the dinner having been squabs. We ate two apiece, and four were removed intact—mute testimony to the French system of economy.

"I can't think *how* she does it!" Letitia had said, in ecstatic appreciation. "We might really be millionaires."

We might be, but we were not. Yet, I had no premonition of evil as I nonchalantly took up the butcher's bill. When I saw it, I uttered an exclamation, and Letitia came running to my side. We looked at it, and rubbed our eyes. We looked again, and rubbed them some more.

"It must be a mistake," Letitia said, paling.

The figures were fat and solid. The amount set forth would have maintained an ordinary family of seven or eight, in comfort, for a month. A horrid sensation of bankruptcy overwhelmed me. Then I looked at the grocer's bill. It was four pages long, and the "demnition total" quite appalling. I could scarcely believe the testimony of my own eyes. The

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gentleman who supplied the fish appeared to be equally rapacious. Was it all a hateful conspiracy, a fell plot to effect my ruin, or—or was it French economy?

"We have eaten ourselves to the poorhouse, Letitia," I said, with a sinking heart. "I—I can't pay these bills."

"Oh, they must be somebody else's bills," murmured Letitia, "they—they can't be ours."

"They can't be anybody else's," I protested, in the calmness born of despair. "Nobody could stand them. Rockefeller doesn't live in this neighborhood. Carnegie is miles away. They *might* be Carnegie's, if he were a neighbor. As it is, my girl, I'm afraid they are ours. Yet how *can* they be?"

"Of course we have lived well," said Letitia reflectively, "we have lived *very* well. We can't even put it down to waste, because French people never waste."

"And yet"—I tried to fathom the mystery—"there has always been three times as much as we could eat. The other night, we had six ptarmigans before us, and we ate one apiece. The inference is, Letitia, either that Madame and Leonie have appetites like cart-horses, or that they throw the things away."

"A French cook throws nothing away," persisted Letitia almost defiantly. "That I know."

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"You had better ask Madame about it," I said doggedly. "Perhaps she can explain."

"That is surely your privilege, Archie. You pay the bills ; I don't."

"Since you have told her that I am just a poor hanger-on, and that you are the money end of the concern, the affair this time, my dear Letitia, is yours."

At present, I flattered myself I had scored one. Letitia had painted her position so luminously, and had etched me in in such somber tints, that I felt master of the situation. Perhaps it was cowardly, but as I had the name I might as well have the game. Although I had said little about the contemptuous treatment I had received from Leonie during the past week, I had felt it acutely. Like the Spartan boy, I had suffered in silence. Being American, and not even a little bit Spartan, this had been difficult.

Letitia was weeping silently, and I felt like a double-distilled brute. "I hate to talk to an artist in that way," she said sorrowfully. "Her temperament will be shocked. You can well imagine, Archie, that such a woman will simply despise us."

"But where's the French system of economy?" I asked wildly. "Where's the *pot au feu* with the delicious soup, and the daintily served meat? You said

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that rats would starve on the refuse from a French kitchen. Why, according to these bills, the refuse from ours would have fattened the entire menagerie at Central Park and the Bronx, including the elephants, tigers and bears."

"Now you're exaggerating," asserted Letitia plaintively; "you're making things out worse than they are. You're—"

I could not afford to argue. Facts stared me in the face. I had a small balance at the bank, which I should over-draw if I made out checks for these bills. The savings I had accumulated were drawing interest in the growing but by no means adult publishing house of Tamworth and Fairfax. I could borrow from Tamworth, of course, this week, but next week loomed up hideously as a sheer impossibility. Something must be done at once.

I rang the bell. "We must talk it over with Madame," I said desperately.

The kitchen, some distance away from the drawing-room, seemed strangely close. We could hear Madame and Leonie laughing weirdly, and though we both of us liked merry moods, this particular brand of mirth grated. There was a pause after my ring. Then Leonie appeared, wiping her mouth, and I told her that I wished to see her aunt.

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"I—I think—she's gone to bed," the maid remarked, after a reluctant moment.

"Why, I just heard her laughing," said Letitia, surprised. "Send her in at once, Leonie." And as the maid departed, Letitia added: "She may be unprepared for the drawing-room."

This was undoubtedly true. Madame came in a moment later, also wiping her mouth, and with her face wreathed in smiles. Her hair was disheveled and her dress disordered. She might have been rolling on the floor. Her look was so strange, her gait so unsteady, that Letitia instinctively clutched my arm. Thereupon, Madame de Lyrolle fell promptly over the tiger-head, and—unlike many who had suffered a similar fate—she lay there, laughing hilariously.

"And me a lady, too!" she exclaimed, pealing with mirth.

Outside the room stood Leonie, apparently deeply agitated. As she saw her star prone on the best rug, and heard the bacchanalian laughter stertorously proceeding from her lips, she entered hastily and approached her relative. Letitia still held my arm in a grip, and my own emotions were—well, mixed.

"Oh, come away, Aunt Delia," pleaded Leonie; "come away. She's not feeling good to-night"—turning to Letitia—"she's had toothache, and swal-

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lowed some of the whisky that she took to ease the pain. It must have gone to her head. Oh, Aunt Delia, get up. That ain't no position for a lady."

Leonie burst into tears. The position was too much for her, especially as Aunt Delia gave unmistakable indications of a fondness for red garters with saucy bows on them!

"Why do you call her Aunt Delia?" asked Letitia sternly, evidently in the belief that the Faubourg St. Germain had no dealings with Delias.

"Because it's her name," replied Leonie sullenly. "That's what I call her. She was Delia O'Shaughnessy before she married that blooming old French chef on the French ocean steamer—blessed if I don't forget its name. She's always Aunt Delia O'Shaughnessy to me."

Letitia covered her face with her hands. Madame O'Shaughnessy de Lyrolle began to kick until the bows on her garters fluttered. Still she laughed, loudly, shockingly, unendingly.

"Was she ever in France?" I asked, mortally pained.

"Not on your tintype!" declared the maid in disgraceful colloquialism, as she advanced to the tiger-head and tried to raise Aunt Delia's two hundred pounds. "New York's good enough for Aunt Delia;

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ain't it, Auntie? She in France! And with that husband! Nobody would want to go to a country that turned out specimens like that. But he taught Aunt Delia how to cook—coached her for years—and don't you forget it. She got that much out of him."

"Now I understand her extravagance," cried Letitia, as though suddenly enlightened. "Now I see it all. He was a cook on some ocean greyhound, and she—"

"Extravagant!" cried Leonie insolently; "I like that. Aunt Delia has cooked for the best people in this country. She has never *yet* hired herself out to cheap skates. Say, Aunt Delia"—frantically endeavoring to pierce that lady's dulled comprehension—"they're complaining. We're extravagant. They want good things, but they hate to pay for 'em. They eat like pigs, and then kick at the bills."

"Come away, Letitia," I said nervously. "You go to your room, and I'll see to this."

"I will not leave you, Archie," she declared, though she was trembling; "I—I'm not afraid."

"Won't either of you help me up with me aunt?" Leonie asked, her anger rising and an unsteadiness of gait, similar to that of the good lady on the tiger-head, manifesting itself. "Call yourselves human beings? Standing there and letting a lady suffer like

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this! You and your gold plates!" (tugging at Aunt Delia). "You and your rich Tarrytown aunt!" (pulling down Aunt Delia's refractory dress). "I don't believe it. I don't believe your stories. We've got our money, any way, and you can fish—fish—fish!"

With each "fish" Aunt Delia raised her limbs, and her dutiful niece pressed them discreetly down. Madame O'Lyrolle de Shaughnessy still continued her ebullition of laughter. She was deaf to her niece's entreaties. She had certainly come to stay, and the tiger-head appeared to suit her artistic tastes.

"You will have to call in a policeman, Archie," said Letitia, in a low voice.

Whether it was the innate sympathy of anything O'Shaughnessy for New York's finest, or whether Letitia's words acted as a stimulant to the lady's artistic temperament, we shall never know, but at the mere utterance of the word "policeman" Aunt Delia decided to quit her recumbent position, and with a look of offended dignity, and Leonie's assistance, she rose to her feet.

"I'd like to see the po-lees-man who'd touch me," she said in deep contralto tones, with a lost chord in them. "Me for me bedstead, Leonie, old gal. Come, give us a hand." Then, with a solemnity that some people might consider humorous, she added, turning

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to Letitia: "Leonie's a good girl, and a comfort—hic—to her old aunt. Sorry to trouble you. Don't mention it. It's a pleasure. As my husband used to say—hang him!—*'Pas de quoi. A votre service.'* Well, we'll go now, and thank you. So long, for a little while!"

Leonie, with an expression of spite on her face that was almost withering, led away the Faubourg St. Germain's caterer. The fumes of wine filled the room and I threw open the windows, heaving a sigh of enjoyment as the fresh air reached us. Letitia's bravery appealed to me, and I complimented her upon her plucky behavior. The reaction had now set in and she was shivering apprehensively.

"I don't think I can stand any more of this, Archie," she said weakly. "I—I've reached the limit. This scene was too degrading—too abject—too incredibly vulgar!"

"They must leave the house in the morning!"

"In the morning!" she cried, aghast. "Why not now? I shouldn't feel safe sleeping with them in the house. They might murder us, or each other."

"They won't murder us, dear," I said soothingly, "and if they choose to murder each other—"

"The scandal would be too horrible. Archie, let

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us implore them to go now. Let us offer them money to leave at once."

"Money!" I said bitterly. "I'm not made of it, my girl. I certainly can't pay them to get out after having given them so much to come in. They won't hurt us, you silly child. They are just a trifle intoxicated."

"A *trifle* intoxicated! How can you say such a thing? Oh, those red garters—those terrible red garters—those bows—will be for ever in my mind. I can never—never—look a red garter in the face again. A trifle intoxicated! Why, it is in conditions like this that the worst crimes are committed. Let us take the midnight train to Tarrytown!"

"And leave them here to complete our ruin! No, Letitia. You have been a brave girl throughout this episode. Just be brave for a bit longer. To-morrow we shall see things differently. These women will sleep quietly, and so shall we."

"I shan't. I couldn't save my life. I should see red garters and those awful odious legs. I should hear that laughter. I can't forget it. O'Shaughnessy! Just think of it—the very name that I loathe, too. Aunt Delia! Isn't it wicked, Archie? Isn't it cruel? Ha! ha! ha! ha! Oh, I can't stand it. Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

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Letitia was in hysterics before I realized it. In alarm, I ran to the dining-room and mixed her a glass of bromo-seltzer, and then ran back and stood over her until she had drunk it. As she grew calmer and an ominous repose took the place of the hysteria, I implored her to try and forget everything until the morning, when these events would seem less awe-inspiring. The riot in the kitchen had ceased. A sound of deep contralto snoring, accompanied by similar music in a tone more treble; was all that we heard. Aunt Delia was evidently sleeping the sleep of the Faubourg St. Germain, while Leonie was still supporting her star.

Nevertheless, I locked our door, and Letitia pushed the bureau against it.

CHAPTER XIX

Our enthusiasm for the alleged joys of an alleged New York home was now decidedly on the wane, and we were face to face with the problem that New Yorkers are strenuously trying to solve: how to live in apparent decency without one. We did not dare, just at present, to do more than reflect upon the intricacies of the enigma. We were, however, disillusioned. The old order of things, to which we still clung, had gone out of fashion, and we began to realize it.

Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle (*née* O'Shaughnessy) and her niece left us next day, with the reluctant aid of the police. Their awakening was not that repentant return to the normal condition that we had confidently expected. Madame's temperament was evidently not addicted to remorse. She was inclined to be violent in the morning, and we were roused by the noise of a hand-to-hand conflict between our hired ladies, in which the finger-nails of each seemed to play leading rôles. So I was obliged to telephone for a policeman, who (being named Doherty) seemed a trifle uncertain whether he had been

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called in to remove Letitia and myself or the Irish Gauls. Apparently he thought that we deserved his attention more picturesquely than they did. A sort of masonic sympathy established itself between Mr. Doherty and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. Letitia and I felt almost *de trop*—as though we were spoiling sport or playing gooseberry. I managed to intimate to Mr. Doherty, however, that though American, I was still master in my own house. In due course, the policeman and the ladies left. In spite of the distasteful memory of Monsieur Hyacinthe de Lyrolle, I fancy that the *chère* Madame was not utterly disgusted with the sex to which he belonged.

The ensuing week was principally devoted to unexpected payments for unexpected things debited to my account by Madame Hyacinthe. Some philosophic people declare that it is a pleasure to pay for what one has had and enjoyed. That may be true. I will not argue the question. I assert, however, that it is difficult to find pleasure in paying for what one has never had, and that somebody else has enjoyed. An adjacent ice-cream parlor sent me in a large bill for ice-cream sodas that had been served in my apartment, at the rate of two or three times a day, during the sojourn of the French ladies. A drug store plied me with an account for various items, the advantages of

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which we had never reaped. For ten days I was busy settling up. It was the "joy of surprise" with a vengeance. Madame had thoughtlessly omitted to clothe herself at my expense. A few tailor-made gowns and ruffled silk petticoats would have added to the joyous revelations.

"When I read," said Letitia, "of the silly New York women who don't know what a home means, and who offer prizes to servants who keep their places, my blood boils. Prizes to servants who keep their places! The prizes should go to the poor housekeepers who are able to overcome their sense of repugnance sufficiently to admit these creatures into their houses, and keep them there."

"The women who talk most about the servant question, my dear," I said sententiously, "are the over-dressed, underfed matrons you see at the lobster palaces, who live on one meal a day, which they take at a restaurant, and spend their mornings in curl-papers and wrappers."

"What I can't understand," resumed Letitia reflectively, "is the total disappearance of what we read about as the dignity of labor. Surely, Archie, it has a dignity. Some people must work for the benefit of others. If everybody had to dust, and sweep, and sew, and cook for herself, what would become of all

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the graces of life, of literature, art, music? I don't see anything so disgraceful in housework. We can't all be equal, can we—except in theory? Why, when you see two people together for just five minutes, you can note the superiority of the one, and the inferiority of the other."

I had no desire to be dragged into an economic discussion. My mind was not in a condition serene enough to grapple with it. I had just paid out nearly eleven dollars to the ice-cream and candy purveyor who had surreptitiously cooled Madame de Lyrolle's "innards."

"I suppose," continued Letitia, "that the reason New York women look so much nicer than they are is that the poor things have no time to do anything for their own mental refinement. They must eat like paupers, live like laborers' wives, and rely for their only pleasure upon clothes and a nocturnal restaurant. Then they slink back to their joyless 'home' and go to a bed that they have, themselves, made."

"Poor souls!" I sighed.

"You can't blame them for lack of conversational power," said Letitia, "or for want of internal resources. They can't even have children in comfort. Mrs. Archer told me that when she was first married she was so busy, and so uncomfortable, and so pressed

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for room, and always without a cook, that she literally had no time to have children. She wanted a little boy, but put off having him until she got a good cook. And as she never obtained the good cook, she felt that she had no right to make a poor little boy unhappy."

"Mrs. Archer talks nonsense," I remarked rather severely (I felt it my duty to be severe on this occasion).

"I don't see it at all. The comforts of home are even more necessary in case of children. These wretched creatures who masquerade as servants and who detest you simply because you employ them—and for no other reason—are menaces to safety. Imagine children around with the inebriated, incompetent drudges we have had—"

Poor Letitia was talking "race suicide" with a vengeance, and I was not inclined to pursue the subject. Cook as an exterminator of the human species seemed too glittering a novelty. Yet there was much common sense in what my level-headed little wife said.

"Cook is a tragedy, my girl," I admitted. "The world has had servants for centuries, and the world has progressed. Now that the end of the old régime is at hand and the cook has turned, I can't fancy that the world will be routed. Something new will be

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discovered, and cook can hang herself. The world must fight its own battles. It is up to the world, and you and I are just atoms."

"Call yourself an atom, if you like, Archie," she said, quite hurt, "but leave me out of it. I hate always being looked upon as an atom and I can't endure scientists. Even if we *are* very petty and unimportant and mere cogs in the wheel, we don't realize it. And if we did realize it, then we should just submit quietly to be ground down and pulverized. I won't be pulverized just yet. And all on account of cook, too!"

But there was no doubt at all about it. Our enthusiasm was waning, and though we still decided to play the farce for a time longer, our effort was half-hearted. We realized the gaunt impossibility of the thing. We studied the life that was lived around us—the bleak, inhospitable holes that apparently refined people called home; nooks with chairs and tables in them, ornate, and decorated, but devoid of the subtle quality known as atmosphere; crannies where the married he and she hid their discomforts, and turned a brave front to the world; cold and dismal recesses where the casual visitor was offered a glass of ice-water, and where old-fashioned hospitality was as dead as a doornail; houses, in which, except

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on state occasions and amid sickening ceremony, bread was never broken, and conviviality unknown; barren kennels, unkempt cages, stark nests, cheerless dormitories! Home, in New York, had gone to the dogs, impelled thither by cook!

"Last week," said Letitia, "Mrs. Archer gave a reception. She hired two colored girls and one man for the occasion. There was a whole line of carriages in the street. It was a very nice affair. Mrs. Archer received her guests in a lovely blue silk dress. There were sandwiches tied up with ribbons, delicious *pâté de foie gras*, *bouillon en tasse*, ices, champagne, and all the rest of it. There was music and altogether a most pleasing time. We all enjoyed it immensely. Two days later I dropped into Mrs. Archer's in the afternoon. I was dead tired—almost fainting for a cup of tea. I found her in a dirty cotton wrapper, dusting the pictures, and looking odious. I hinted for tea, but it was no good. She had no servant. At last, in desperation, I asked for a sip of water, and she ran and brought it for me—in a teacup!"

"A cup of tea is certainly not too much to expect," I murmured meditatively.

"The poorest artisan's wife, with seventeen children, and three rooms, could afford a cup of tea," declared Letitia, in pained tones; "but a cup of tea

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suggests home, you know. Hospitality suggests home. People here have lost the knack of it. These bedizened Jezebels of the intelligence offices have smashed the idea to pieces. One has to set a day for the visitor, and prepare for it two weeks beforehand."

"It must be true," I declared. "People don't drop in to dinner nowadays."

"They can't, because the host and the hostess drop out—to dinner."

It seemed impossible to realize that not so very long ago both Letitia and I had scoffed at the mere idea of the existence of such a thing as the servant question. We had disdained to admit it. We had shut our eyes, and cook had knocked us in the face. We were now as gods knowing good and evil, with more of the latter than the former. Our skittish lives were embittered. The beginning of the end had set in, and the prelude was being played.

Yet we frivoled with a cook or two more. Nobody could possibly accuse us of cowardice. Some may say that we were silly (and to these I simply remark: prove it); but cowardly, we were not. We distinctly warded off the time of surrender. We fought to the last finish, until our cook-mangled bodies gave out in sheer inability to cope with the enigma.

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We secured the aid of an ancient lady, who had first breathed the breath of life in Ireland—a country, by-the-by, that talks eloquently of home rule, and yet kindly sends all its cooks over here. However, Ireland's bitterest foes could wish it no worse fate than the sort of home rule that its own cook-ladies administer.

Mrs. O'Toole was sixty years old. She had been a cook, she informed us, for thirty-five years. That time she had apparently devoted to the art of learning how to learn nothing. All she could do was to stew prunes. It had taken her thirty-five years to acquire the knack. I could have stewed the universe in less time. She was most amiable, but had never heard of the most ordinary dishes that the most ordinary people affect. Like Mistress Anna Carter, she had infinite belief in the delicatessen curse—in the cooked-up rubbish that unfortunates throw down their luckless throats—in the instinct that prompts savages to eat earth.

We called in Aunt Julia (poor Aunt Julia! I don't hate her nearly as much now!), in the hope that she might be able to teach Mrs. O'Toole a few rudimentary things, and as cook seemed so affable, we reasoned that she would probably be very glad to learn.

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But, bless your heart, Mrs. O'Toole had a soul above the sordid question of acquiring culinary knowledge. Aunt Julia cooked and Mrs. O'Toole let her cook!

"If you will just watch me, Mrs. O'Toole," said Aunt Julia politely, "I'm sure you will be able to make this dish to-morrow."

The cook-lady laughed in sheer light-heartedness. "Sure, mum," she said, "I've been thirty-five years without knowing how to make it, and I'm still alive. I've buried a husband and seven children, and have had a good time without all them new-fangled notions."

It was hopeless. Mrs. O'Toole hummed *The Wearing o' the Green* for the sake of her nationality, and took out her knitting. She was most good-tempered and pleasant about it, but she had no yearning to learn how to cook. Yet she must have had a ferociously arduous time in learning how *not* to cook. She was charmingly familiar with us both—a real good soul with a rooted objection to the kitchen.

"Yet some of these silly Guilds," said Letitia, "announce that they are going to teach women how to cook. How can they teach women who won't learn? My opinion is that the Guilds would have much quicker pupils if they promised to teach them how to loop the loop."

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Mrs. O'Toole was so jovial that I could almost see her looping the loop at Coney Island, and hear her emitting shrieks of Hibernian jollity as she hung head downward in that delightful institution. But I could not—and did not—see her cooking a dinner and laying a table.

She went with as much good humor as she came. We kept her in our midst for a month, not because we wanted her for culinary purposes, but because she seemed able to sit in the kitchen, while we went out to dinner. She was both sober and honest, and had probably generally spent an innocuous month in every place. During a service of thirty-five years she must have graced four hundred and twenty places. Admitting, at a low average, three people to each household, she had therefore catered to twelve hundred and sixty appetites! It was an inspiring thought.

Mrs. O'Toole's successor was an English lassie. At another time, our spirits would have risen at the prospect of an Albionite—a disciple of a country where servants still exist to some extent. As it was, we were so thoroughly discouraged that we had no illusions—which was just as well, as it spared us the annoyance of having them shattered. Katie Smith had been in the country but three days, but the rapid pace at

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which she had Americanized was the subtlest sort of compliment to New York City.

There was very little that was typically English about her, save a picturesque helplessness. In return for lost help she had nothing to offer. Of course, the lack of help would not have bothered us in the least. Miss Smith was very frank. She had gone wrong "at home," and had been shipped here by her relatives. It was assumed that here she would "go right." We had no objections whatever to her past. Little cared we, in our desperation, for such trivialities as a past. We asked no questions, and were not curious as to her crime. Any old crime would suit us—as long as the criminal herself would let us live in peace.

Miss Smith told us—still archly candid—that she had decided to become a cook, because, immediately on landing, she had been told that Americans were in such dire straits for cooks.

"And have you ever been a cook?" asked Letitia kindly.

"Oh, never," she replied indignantly, in a perish-the-thought tone, "I was a factory lady in the pen establishment of Messrs. M. Myers and Son, of Birmingham. Me a cook! Not I. But, of course, in this country, I don't think I shall mind it, as the wages are high."

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Months ago, we should have politely indicated the exact location of the door. Now, we were battered and pulpy, and remonstrance seemed absurd. Again we sent for Aunt Julia (on second consideration, I really like Aunt Julia!) and introduced her to the latest specimen of the genus "clean slate."

My heart, at first, "kind of" went out to Katie Smith, because she had made pens, which are so necessary to me. But Letitia remarked, rather brusquely, that pens are not puddings, and that although they were *my* bread-and-butter, she had no desire to eat them with hers. I am bound to say that Letitia's moods were becoming most variable. They were as unreliable as April weather. I suppose that the constant surprise was rather wearing on the poor girl.

Miss Smith's career was so short that I might almost call it instantaneous. After having cooked us one alleged dinner, which tasted very much as pens *au gratin* might possibly taste, she asked Letitia if she might go into the garden, to get the air.

Letitia thought that she was joking. The garden! Perhaps, like the wine-cellar, it was under the bed in the spare room. Letitia laughed, but Miss Smith was serious.

"I couldn't stay in no place where there wasn't no garding," she said. "My! Ain't you cramped up for

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room, with a kitchen like a blooming cubby'-ole, and all the places so 'ot that one can't breathe. And no garding! What do you do to get the air?"

"You can put on your things and go for a walk, Katie," said Letitia good-naturedly. "Some of the girls in the house get the air, as you call it, on the roof. Would you like to go up on the roof?"

Miss Smith was much amused. "Crikey!" she cried, "me on the roof! No, thank you, mum. I should get giddy, and that wouldn't do. I'm sorry, Mrs. Fairfax, but I must 'ave a garding, for the sake of me 'ealth. There must be a place where I can stroll of an evening."

So Albion's little lassie left us, and we wired to poor Aunt Julia to tell her that she need not bother to come as there was nothing to come for. We were not more dejected than usual, for we had lost hope, and had ceased to garner expectations.

"Perhaps if I asked our landlord to knock down a few of his houses and plant a garden, we might induce Katie to stay," I suggested sardonically to Letitia. "He owns three or four houses on this block. A very nice garden could be made. I wonder if she would like an old rose garden or if she would be satisfied with any old garden? He might even put in an orchard for her."

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Letitia sighed. "Yes, dear," she said. "I feel I ought to laugh at your humor, but you'll forgive me, Archie, won't you, if I fail to discover its value? Katie was really not a bad sort, and it is annoying to think that just because we hadn't a garden—"

"But she couldn't cook, my girl!"

"Of course she couldn't *cook*. You expect too much, Archie. If she had known how to cook she wouldn't have applied for the position. But she knew how to open the front door, and yesterday, when I asked her to bring me a glass of water, she was able to draw it for me. That, it seems to me, is quite an accomplishment for a New York domestic."

One other attempt we made to stem the tide. Mrs. Archer, who sympathized sincerely with our plight and had grown accustomed to her own, which was similar, had heard of a nice fat orphan from an orphan asylum, who had taken the notion to "live out." (The expression "taking the notion" belongs exclusively to the New York hired lady. It symbolizes her state of mind as new ideas dawn upon it.) So we let in the nice fat orphan, and put her in the kitchen. She was a simple, unsophisticated thing, who had been rigidly educated in an excellent Roman Catholic institution, in blissful ignorance of the world in which she was expected to earn her living later.

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She burst out sobbing when she saw the lonely kitchen, and refused to be comforted. She had always had young girls around her, she said, and had never been separated from orphans. Letitia told her that she was an orphan, and—as an extra inducement—that I was an orphan. The girl looked at her in blank incredulity and with an expression of dismay. Her idea of orphans was a crowd of little girls in uniform, marching around, two by two. She could not do without this. She had never done without it. She cried so bitterly, that Letitia was touched.

“Poor thing!” she said gently, as she told the story to me, “I only wish we knew some nice young orphans, Archie, to sit in the kitchen with her. But, of course, we don’t. It really grieves me.”

Letitia irritated me. How could she be gentle, and kind, and tender, confronted with all these wretched subterfuges and false pretenses?

“I might go out and kill a few gentlemen and ladies,” I suggested savagely; “and ask their orphans to play with this girl. It is the only way out of the difficulty. Really, Letitia, you are getting quite childish. I have no patience—”

“That is quite true, dear. You certainly have no patience. This girl is most respectable. She is too

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young to drink, too religious to steal, too friendless to roam around—”

“Too idiotic to be useful—”

“In time, she might be useful,” Letitia asserted, though with doubt in her voice. “She is an innocent little thing and I feel sorry for her. I can’t help it; I do. She is so helpless! She doesn’t even know her surname. She calls herself **Rachel**, pure and simple. She is not sure how old she is. I hate to let her go, Archie.”

“You needn’t mind it in the least,” I said; “she can walk right out of this house and get any position she wants. She can call herself a first-class cook and people will be glad to get her. When she sees that there are no orphans attached to the ordinary kitchen, she will accustom herself to the idea. You need have no scruples, Letitia. It is the poor devils of men who deserve sympathy in New York. If a woman suffers, it is because she is lazy and worthless.”

“How hard-hearted you are!”

“No, I’m not. Never will I give a cent in charity to any begging woman. It is the men who have a hard time in this city. They can have any help that I am able to give them. But to the women I say merely: Learn how to do housework. Take a lesson

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or two in cooking. Study the home, and you can get good, comfortable positions as long as you want them ! Any woman, begging in the New York streets, while thousands of unfortunate people clamor to give them good wages, should be arrested as a useless encumbrance. Those are my sentiments."

"I dare say you are right, Archie," said Letitia, evidently impressed by my fiery eloquence, which bubbled forth, almost unpunctuated. "It seems to me that most of these women would sooner roam the streets in rags, and herd together in tenement houses like cattle, than do the work for which they should be fitted. It is wonderful."

"Not wonderful," I said, "but deplorable. It is the spirit of independence gone wrong—turned against itself—pushed in a painful direction, like an ingrowing toe-nail. A system of education that educates in the letter and not in the spirit, is responsible. The mistaken idea of universal equality is the root of the evil. Shakespeare was no better than the man who blacked his boots; Goethe no bit superior to the women who cooked his hash. Delicate truths like this are instilled into the minds of the people. Silly socialistic men and women who have no use for either the comforts or refinements of life, are the criminals. Idle people who want to turn epigrams

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find this a fertile theme. Why, Letitia, do you remember when we went to see *Candida* the other night, we noticed that even a man like Bernard Shaw was not averse from making one of his characters inveigh against the crime of keeping servants? It was Morell, I think, who was indignant that the young poet's father kept so many servants. 'Anyhow, when there's anything coarse-grained to be done,' he said, 'you ring the bell, and throw it on to somebody else. That's one of the great facts in your existence.' A man like Shaw, who lives in refinement, with a delightful home, neat-handed servants, a charming wife, and all the rest of it, can not resist the opportunity to hammer at a scheme that he must know is absolutely necessary."

"You will talk yourself hoarse, dear," said Letitia. "Of course, Archie, it is a showy theme. People who use it can always be sure of making a hit with the gallery. Teaching equality is delightful entertainment for those who could never possibly be equal—who are literally born unequal. Why, Archie, some people, through no fault of their own, are born idiots. How could they possibly be equal to those who were not so born?"

"In the meantime," I continued, "those who are born idiots avenge themselves on society by going out

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as cooks. It is their little scheme for getting even with the world. This has given cooks a bad name. Nobody cares to be in the same class as the idiot."

"I'm only sorry," murmured poor Letitia, "that I learned Latin instead of cooking."

"But my girl," I said soothingly, "I did not intend to marry a cook, and I would not have you changed in one single particular."

She kissed me. "Just the same," she went on, "I'm sorry. It is an art. There are the arts of Cooking, and Higher Cooking, and Scientific Cooking, that are gastronomics worthy of study. I realize that, now it is too late. Willingly would I substitute Brillat-Savarin for Ovid, if I only could! It is unfortunate."

"My dear," I said, and I drew her to my knee to break the news as easily as possible, "we have come to the end of our tether. As the children say when they have finished playing, we must 'bosh up.' We must make the best of a bad job, and, living in New York, do as New Yorkers do. In fact, our housekeeping must end."

"Oh, Archie!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears; "do you—do you really mean it?"

I bowed my head. It was inevitable.

CHAPTER XX

Letitia sat on an empty barrel in the carpetless drawing-room; there was desolation in her heart, chaos in mine; the tragedy of finality in the atmosphere. Strange men in linen overalls, ponderous boots, and crackly voices, creaked around, blithely disrespectful and lugubriously light-hearted. They whistled. One was named Jim; a second, Sam; a third, Joe. They had no surnames and needed none. They had come to put our poor little hollow mockery of a home into the New York receiving vault of all domestic remains known as the "storage warehouse."

Sometimes they sang, as their work of devastation proceeded. They were merry souls. Occasionally they suggested the flowing bowl as an incentive to higher effort. Every day they took the corpses of homes that had succumbed to the "storage warehouse," and their sentiment was dead. Homes died so quickly in New York; their hold upon life was so frail; their assertive powers so numbed; their prospects of longevity so pitifully small!

If New York furniture could think, its reflections

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would busy themselves with that time of passive pension and surcease from dusting, in the storage warehouse! If tables and chairs could speak, what would they not say of a fate that nipped them in their very bud and shipped them off, in arrested development, to a long vacation?

Letitia sat on the empty barrel, a veritable picture of woe. Her dress was bedraggled and her hair unkempt. She had a smut on the end of her nose and it did not worry her. It was one of those smuts that it was quite impossible to overlook—large, black, and deep, intimating that it would spread, if touched. Her eyes were fixed upon Jim, and Sam, and Joe. She saw them through the dust, darkly. “Patience on a monument,” could have taught my poor Letitia many useful things!

“If you please, mum,” said Jim, pausing in a cheery rendition of *Laughing Water* to confront Letitia; “I’ll just start packing the china in that barrel, if you’ll kindly get down. Sorry to disturb you, mum, but we’ll try and get it done before we go to lunch.”

Lunch! Letitia shuddered, but she jumped from the barrel. Sympathetically, I appreciated her feelings. The word lunch sounded so dismally cruel. These men could eat horrid, stout, meat sandwiches

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and drink stupefying beer in the very midst of preparing us for the storage warehouse! This lunch seemed more of an outrage upon respectable sentiment than did the medical man's snack between the acts of a *post-mortem* examination.

Letitia was dry-eyed until they took up the tiger-head, over which we had fallen at so many merry, unexpected moments, and began to fold it up. Then she burst into tears and ran into the dining-room, where I followed her, slowly, and mournfully.

"Don't, Letitia," I said, feeling ridiculously oppressed. "Why should we mind? New Yorkers don't think anything of all this. They rather like it. They look upon it as emancipation from care and worry. Don't cry, my girl. See, let me wipe that smut from your nose."

"No, you s-shan't," she sobbed, warding me off. "If I ch-choose to be s-smutty, I—I w-will be s-smutty."

I sat down and beat a nervous tattoo on the last table that had the last cloth upon it. The last cruet, containing the last vinegar, and the last mustard stood on this last table that had the last cloth upon it. I allowed Letitia to have her cry out. When she had finished and had dried her eyes, the smut had expanded to such an extent that portions of it were

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smeared upon her cheeks, chin, and lips. Under the circumstances, there was bathos amid the poor girl's pathos!

"I can't realize it, Archie," she said funereally, when her equanimity was restored. "I can't grasp the fact that this is really the end, and that to-night—to-night, my poor boy—we shall be lodged in a family hotel, so-called, I suppose, because none of the guests have families and the proprietor wouldn't take them in if they had!"

"I dare say, dear, we shall be very comfortable."

"Parlor and bedroom elegantly furnished; bath; generous *cuisine*; fine music; view of Central Park and Hudson River! I have learned it all by heart. Nothing of it belongs to us, Archie. It is the sort of thing one looks at for two weeks in Paris, or Rome, or Berlin, but to regard it as permanent is too dreadful. And the starchy, artificial women strutting into the dining-room, wearing all the clothes they can get on to their backs, with their cheerless husbands in tow, eating the dinners that they haven't ordered and grumbling about them; then, trotting away from the dining-room, back to their silent rooms, there to wait until it is bedtime."

"You can't possibly know, Letitia," I said, "as

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you've never lived in one of these places. You are morbid, and a bit unreasonable."

"Oh, I've met people who *have* lived in them," she retorted, "and who have liked it. They had nothing to worry about and nothing even to think about—except how to kill time. A friend of Mrs. Archer's told me that the favorite topic of conversation was the food. Was the meat of the best quality? Were the vegetables fresh or canned? Was the table as bountiful this season as last? Most of the people, it seems, grow tired of the food and go to other restaurants in despair."

She paused, racking her brain for more torments and apparently taking a keen pleasure in torturing herself. Yet we both knew that it was inevitable. We had discussed the matter into shreds and argued it into tatters. Still, there was a sort of luxury in this grief.

"I can see myself a year hence," she went on contemptuously, "going to flashy restaurants with you, and—perhaps, Archie, stealing spoons and forks, and bringing them home—I say 'home' but I mean 'family hotel'—as souvenirs. Mrs. Archer told me that all these women do that. I think it loathsome and detestable, now, but I dare say that I shall be exactly

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like the other women, as I am going to live in exactly the same way, for exactly the same reason."

"You will never descend to that, my girl," I said solemnly.

"How do you know?" she asked perversely. "I dare say we shall be so frantic for something to do that we shall look upon this kind of petty theft as sport—just as some people regard fishing. Of course, we shall. I imagine I shall feel proud of myself if I have successfully sneaked a sugar-bowl, and I can picture your joy at landing a silver soup-tureen! Oh, it will be exciting. We shall come to it; see if we don't."

"Please—please don't talk in that way, Letitia. Yesterday you were quite resigned and even happy. I can't bear to see you in this mood. We both agreed that the family hotel was the only hope. We were driven to it—absolutely impelled to it. I think it is the packing that is upsetting you."

"Sorry to trouble you," said Joe, poking his head in at the door; "we've finished the parlor, and are now going to start on this room. We've left two chairs in the parlor for you to sit on. Sorry to trouble you."

Poor Letitia gave way again, as she saw our little

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"drawing-room" completely denuded. Nothing was left. Gone were the pictures, the ornaments, the tiger-head, the Indian cabinet, the what-nots and shelves, the footstools and plants. Barrels, crates, bits of wood, nails, old newspapers, straw, littered the room. It was the abomination of desolation.

Letitia sat and wept on one chair. I took the other and closed my eyes in rueful meditation. Before my mental vision a procession of our destroyers passed mockingly. I saw Anna Carter, Mrs. Potzenheimer, Birdie Miriam McCaffrey, Gerda Lyberg, Olga Al-lallami, Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle, Leonie, Katie Smith, Rachel, and—could I ever forget that wistful, winsome face?—Priscilla Perfoozle. They seemed to glare at me revengefully, as though their aims had been accomplished, and their fell projects crowned with success. Then they formed a ring around me and danced in fiendish abandon. Each appeared to wear a badge on the left side of her bodice, just over the heart, and I could read the legend, "Death to the Home." The sight was ghastly. They grinned from ear to ear, in precisely the same way, and I was surprised to notice that their black dresses, heavily trimmed with crape, were precisely alike, as though they were all members of some devilish sisterhood. I

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believe I tried to open my eyes; my heart was beating wildly; I could feel the perspiration streaming from my face; I heard myself groan.

"Archie?" cried Letitia, at my side. "What is the matter? My poor boy, you have been asleep, and you must have been dreaming—at this time of day, too! Oh, you poor thing, you feel it all even more than I do. How selfish I am, after all—thinking only of myself. It is wicked of me and ungrateful. After all, what does anything really matter, as long as we have each other—you and I—and our health and our strength, and"—with a smile—"the price."

Her words fell sweetly upon my ear. It was good to know that I had been nightmarining in the daytime, and that the fiendish sisterhood was intangible.

"Cheer up, Archie," she went on, "we were both silly, gloomy things, and there is no reason why we should feel so oppressed, is there? As you say, it is this packing that has upset us. Packing is a horrid institution, anyway, even when one is going away for pleasure. I always feel sorry to leave any place, even if I hate it; don't you, Archie? I guess that we are both alike, and that we weren't built for such an unsentimental place as New York City."

"We've nearly finished the dining-room," said

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Sam, looking in upon us suddenly, "and we'd like to bring a few of the things in here, if you wouldn't mind stepping into the bedroom! Sorry to trouble you, mum!"

In a less remorseful frame of mind, we were driven to our little bedroom, as yet untouched. Letitia made a brave effort to remain calm. I could see that she was biting her lip, and I appreciated her determination so thoroughly that I made up my mind to do all I could to steer clear of further pathos. We sat on the bed.

"I read this morning, Letitia," I said hurriedly, "that a bill has been introduced into the Assembly for the protection of homes from the unfit servants that are supplied by intelligence offices. It is asserted that women who should not be permitted to come in contact with the family circle are sent out. Strong arguments were made, and—"

Letitia smiled in spite of herself. "It is amusing," she said. "Why bother about abolishing bad servants when there are no others? It is wonderful how people can interest themselves in that side of the case, when it is the other that is responsible for all our troubles. However, I suppose they need their little pastimes, even in Albany, and the uninitiated might think,

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when they read about it, that a bill to abolish bad servants would help you to get good ones, which is, of course, idiotic, as there are none."

"Of course you are right, dear," I said, glad to see that I had roused her.

"Anyway," she continued, "most people don't want homes and have forgotten what they are like, so that there is no need to feel too regretful. Unfortunately, the real nuisance is that when we're old and have grandchildren, we shall never be able to treat them in the good old way. Grandpa and grandma will be in furnished rooms and the old homestead will exist no more! Perhaps, after all, the home is just a relic of barbarism. Even grandchildren, however, are going out of fashion. New York women are too young to have them, and they have lost the art of growing old. Fancy a New York grandmother in a cap, knitting, with her grandchildren at her knee! No, Archie. She prefers yellow hair, a blush (supplied from a nineteen-cent box) upon her cheek, and a pneumatic figure pumped up around her poor old bones, to the ancient poetic notion."

"It is the spirit of progress."

"Yes, dear, it must be. Grandma is a giddy young thing and not a bit disturbed when grandpa is gathered unto his fathers. When that happens, she very

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often marries a pretty little college lad, who was in long dresses when her first grandchild was born. And she takes him to live with her in the family hotel and provides for him generously. And when she really can't live any longer—she would if she could—she dies and leaves him her cash. Dear strenuous young-old thing! One can't help admiring this wonderful tenacity."

"You and I are horridly old-fashioned, Letitia."

"And we *must* reform," she declared emphatically. "It can't go on any longer. To us, New York seems funny, doesn't it? And the complicated relationships are so peculiar. An old woman (I beg her pardon, I mean a woman who, years ago, would have been old) and her daughter, think nothing of marrying brothers, and becoming all sorts of impossible relations to each other. Even that most hackneyed of all comic institutions, the mother-in-law, is a light and airy creature in this country, and has no rooted objection to being sued by her own daughter for alienating the affections of her own son-in-law."

Letitia's exaggerations made me laugh. But it did her good to think them up and I made no protests. I was glad to see that she was herself again, and that the nerve-racking noise of the packing no longer disturbed her as acutely as it had done.

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"These family hotels simplify things, of course," she said. "They do away with all fuss and feathers. A man takes an elegantly furnished suite, and just asks in a wife! An old lady engages a handsome apartment and fishes up a husband to live in it with her. The *ménage* starts immediately. No furnishers, and decorators, and upholsterers, and servants are necessary. Monsieur and Madame are at home instantly. In the old days, the establishment of a home meant everything. Now it is established almost as easily as it is broken up."

"We're ready for the bedroom, now"—Joe appeared again—"and if you wouldn't mind stepping into the kitchen! Sorry to disturb you, mum!"

There was nothing pathetic about the kitchen. The sight of the kitchen certainly awakened no regrets. The things were all packed, but we gazed stolidly around us, at the place that had made home-life impossible.

"The poor still have their homes, Letitia," I said, "and the working people have not yet experienced all the signs of the times that you mention."

"They will come to it," she declared—and I couldn't help smiling at her earnestness; "they are just waiting. Perhaps next century there will be no work-people. The trades-unions are doing their best.

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You wonder how I know all these things, Archie. Yes, you do; I can see it in your face. Well, I'll tell you. For the last month I have been reading nothing but these subjects. I haven't touched Ovid or Cicero. I don't believe I ever shall again. I am so fearfully interested in a condition of society that votes all labor a nuisance and consigns the 'sweat of the brow' to the luxury of the Turkish bath."

"To think that cook has led us to this!" I murmured.

"Cook is the all-pervading evil, Archie. She is the outward manifestation of this spirit of unrest. Mrs. Potzenheimer is but a type; Birdie Miriam McCaffrey is merely symbolic; Madame Hyacinthe de Lyrolle is simply—"

"Unfit for publication, my dear," I interposed, and we both smiled. The rays of a gentle optimism were beginning to soothe us, as we realized our own non-responsibility in the matter of Fate, personified by Cook! At any rate, she had left us together. She had been powerless to separate us.

* * * * *

It was over. We stood in the street and watched the last relics of our little home, as they were placed in the storage-house wagons. They stood on the pavement for rude little boys to stare at, awaiting the

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helping hands of Jim, and Sam, and Joe. The Indian cabinet seemed to blink in the sun, as it rested on the sidewalk, preparatory to its journey.

"Poor thing!" said Letitia, with a little gulp, as it was finally hoisted into the wagon. "It was only meant to be ornamental. It tried hard. It did its best. It stood by us, Archie, as long as it could. I hate to think of it, locked up in seclusion, with nobody to look at it."

"There's our bureau!" I interrupted, as the pretty bit of furniture that had been honored by the encumbrance of Letitia's dainty toilet silver made its appearance out of doors, in the stark daylight. "I never realized until now what a beauty it was. How they bang it about! They have no respect for furniture. Here, you Jim"—to the son of toil—"try and be careful. Honestly, Letitia, these household goods of ours seem to be reproaching us."

"Dear old inanimates!" she cried. "I dare say they know that we couldn't help it, that we were the victims of—Cook. Oh, Archie, there's the tiger-head, tied up, but still quite recognizable."

The head had escaped from the restraining cords. It was salient, and impressive. The mouth of the tiger was open, in a snarl, and the glass eyes shone. Jim placed it on a chest of drawers, for which he was mak-

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ing a corner in the wagon. Letitia approached it in a sort of surreptitious manner, and patted the head. Then the foolish girl leaned forward and deliberately kissed the soft, smooth fur. Two little boys grinned derisively, and seemed to congratulate themselves upon their excellent position for a free show.

The cab that was to take us to our family hotel stood at the door, and the trunks, containing our wearing-apparel, were laboriously placed upon it by the men. It was ready for us, but we could not tear ourselves away from the uncanny fascination of the wagons. Letitia held my arm, and we watched each fragment of our broken home, as it was lifted from our view into the recesses of the greedy vehicle.

"Perhaps," I said, with a suspicious tremor in my voice, "we shall see them again before very long. They are still ours, Letitia. I—I—shall pay for their board every month; it—it will be a pleasure to do so. You know, my girl, we can—we can call them back at any moment."

A large tear was trickling down Letitia's cheek, as she saw the men take their places on the wagons and realized that this—this was, indeed, the very end.

"No, Archie," she said, "we shall never call them back. We shall never dare to do it. And, in the years to come, our experiences with these dear old

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things—that, later on, we shall sell—will sound like some absurd and far-fetched story that a new generation will never credit. The question that has broken us will be solved only in the way in which we are trying to solve it. There is, and there will be, no other solution.”

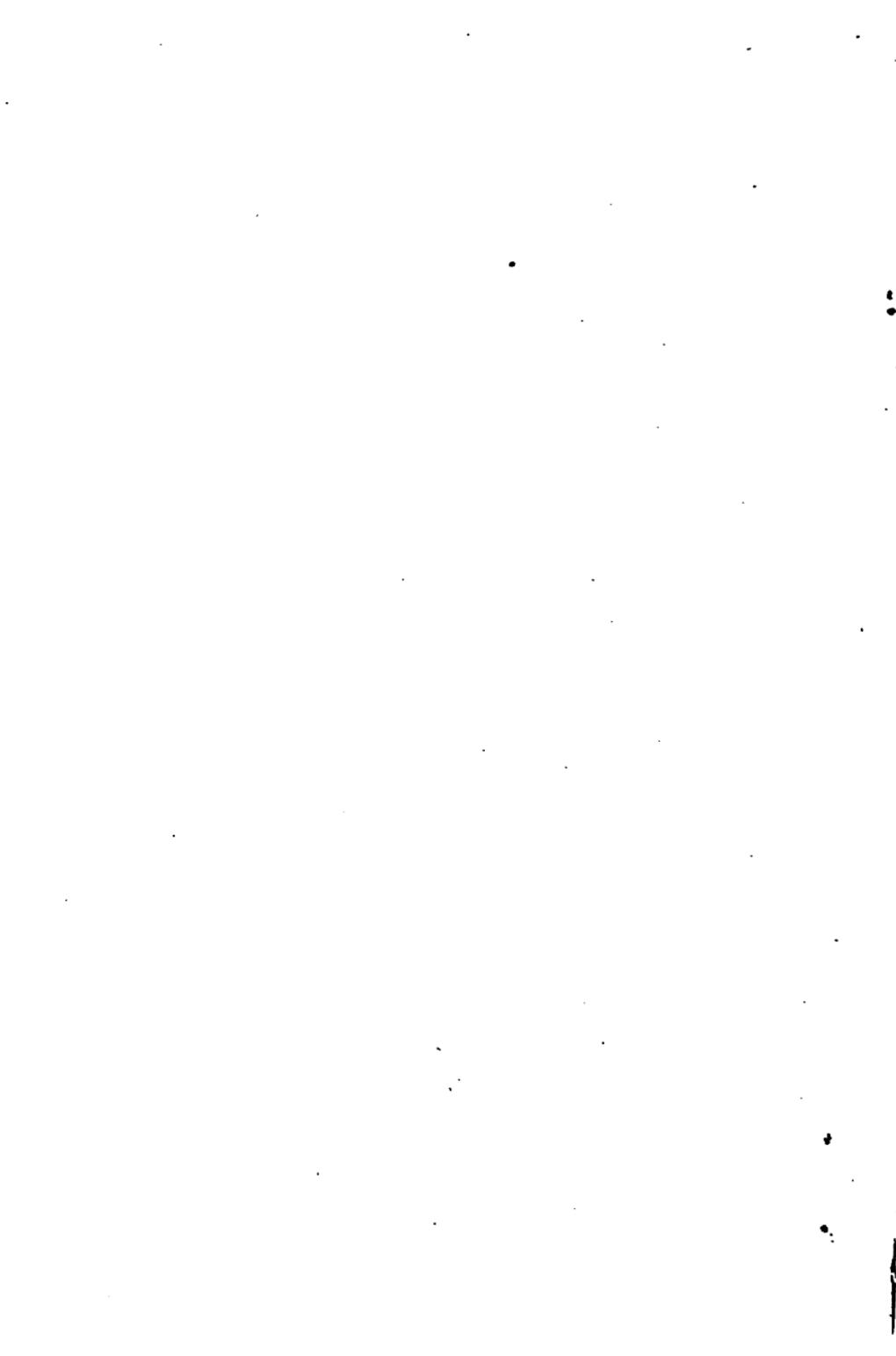
Jim smacked a whip; a huge “home”—laden wagon groaned and labored for a moment; then it slowly and reluctantly moved away. We watched it until it reached the corner and turned from our sight. The tears were streaming down Letitia’s face, and I must confess that I bit my mustache so ferociously that I left ragged ends.

“Come, my girl,” I said in a low voice, as I opened the door of the cab. She got in, and I followed. We leaned back, heavy, silent, and with a mortal sorrow in our hearts. Then—then—

We were driven swiftly away to a new condition of things, in which the cooks shall cease from troubling, and we shall be at rest.

THE END

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